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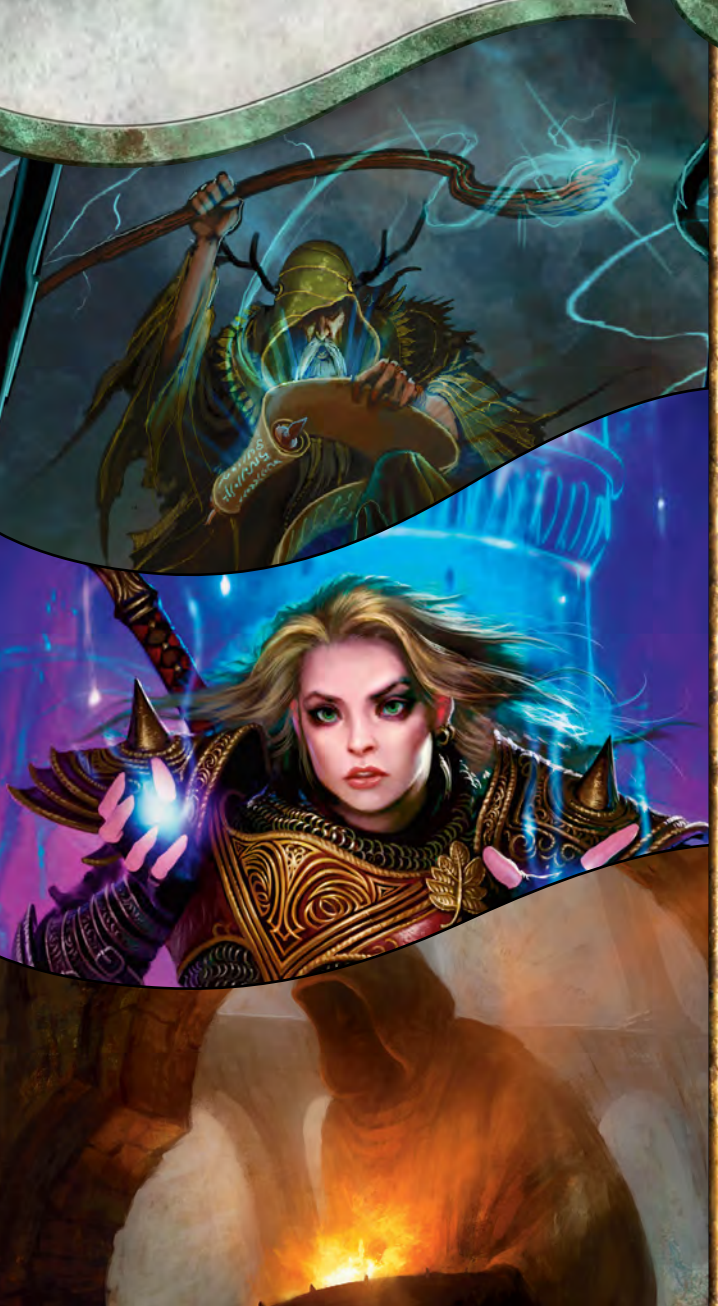
DRAGON®

A Dungeons & Dragons® Roleplaying Game Supplement



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CONTENTS

3 TIME TINKERER
By Greg Bilsland
Time flies when you're having fun, and especially when you're playing D&D.

4 SHAKE YOUR WORLD
By Steve Townshend
When the world becomes predictable, it's time to shake things up.

15 UNEARTHED ARCANA: TIME TRAVEL
By Robert J. Schwalb
Time travelers move through time's river, forward or backward, like fish in a stream.

20 GHOST OF THE PAST
By Robert van Wijk and Robert J. Schwalb
You were born in an age of empires and magnificence. How did you wind up here?

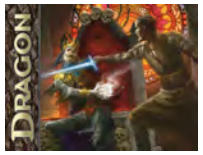
24 IT'S ABOUT TIME
By Peter Schaefer
Magicians have always tinkered with time. A few of their trials were bound to work.

29 RIVER RAT
By Jeff Morgenroth
A river rat survives on dockside scraps but thrives on risk and daring.

33 THE HARPERS OF WATERDEEP
By Erin M. Evans
The reformed Harpers of Waterdeep bring the skills of spies to the cause of right.

39 ECOLOGY OF THE KRUTHIK
By Tim Eagon
Turathi beastmasters bred these horrors for war, then lost control of their creations.

44 THE THREE-HEADED HELM
By Ed Greenwood
Not all secret societies are out to destroy the world.



ON THE COVER: *Howard Lyon depicts the fall of a lich king, a world-shaking event if ever there was one.*

DRAGON

430

DRAGON December 2013

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Time Tinkerer

By Greg Bilsland

They say the first step is admitting you have a problem, so here's my admission: I'm a time tinkerer. It's like clockwork; if one of my campaigns goes on long enough, I'll turn to time travel. I'm not alone here, right? The temptation to shake the hourglass is too much for many Dungeon Masters to resist. We spend hundreds of hours carefully crafting our campaigns and worlds, and then think, "You know what would be really cool? Time travel." Forget memorizing details, preserving verisimilitude, and striving for continuity. Let's just drop a bomb in the middle of the world and the time line, and see what happens. Perhaps we do it from a desire to give the players some ownership of the setting. More likely, though, we get bored and want to tear things apart and restart.

My chronomance romance started early. In the first D&D campaign I ever played, we had a custom-designed spell called *touchnode*. The spell let the caster glimpse a touched point as it existed at a random amount of time in the past—usually decades or centuries. (In reality, I think the random amount of time was whatever the DM decided the players should see from the past.) The concept was cool, but I don't know what madness drove the DM to allow this spell. It meant he always had to be ready to describe the past of an object or place. And since the spell was only 1st-level, I naturally used every extra spell slot at the end of each day to cast it on everything in sight.

In one of my early 4th Edition campaigns, I was looking for a way to convey past events to my players without letting them time travel. Inspired by an idea from *Final Fantasy VIII*, I conspired to have the characters' minds transported into past incarnations of themselves. This gave the players an investment in learning about these former heroes, which became a narrative font that I could consistently return to.

Thus, for you fellow chronomantic romantics, we have four articles—for players and DMs—that involve tinkering with time. We couldn't let the magazines go on break without bringing back Robert J. Schwalb, of course. We've set him free from creating magic items for D&D Next so that he could craft an Unearthed Arcana article that can throw your game into chaos with time travel. Another of our favorite writers, Steve Townshend, who is working on monsters for D&D Next, returns to the magazine to write about shaking things up in your campaign.

And then we have kruthiks. And river halflings. Neither of which have anything to do with time—these articles were really great, and we didn't want them to lie fallow during the hiatus. Additionally, we have the first *Dragon* article by Erin M. Evans, author of *The God Catcher* and this month's Sundering novel, *The Adversary*. Erin has extensive knowledge of the Forgotten Realms setting, which she puts to use this month in an article about the Harpers.

Speaking of time well spent, Erin and I recently participated in a D&D marathon for Extra Life, a gaming event that benefits Children's Miracle Network hospitals. I was the Dungeon Master for this crazy 25-hour event, and here's the remarkable thing: It went by in a flash. It's said that time flies when you're having fun. It's a cliché, I know, but I think that's part of why we're still playing D&D after three decades. Dungeons & Dragons let's us travel through time—not just because we become fantasy characters in a medieval world, but because we can lose track of time and reality as we enjoy the company of a great group of friends—even for 25 hours.

Shake Your World

By Steve Townshend

Illustrations by Howard Lyon, William O'Connor, Devon Cady-Lee, and Vincent Dutrait

When we think of world-shaking events, we tend to think big: wars that pit the forces of good against evil in a final confrontation, natural disasters that lay waste to entire civilizations, invasions of vast armies or extraplanar hordes, assassinations of world leaders. These are the events that title the chapters of history.

In a D&D game, world-shaking events move the story of the campaign forward. The most common pitfall of serial stories without a set beginning, middle, and end structure is inertia. Like many television shows and comic book series, RPG campaigns run the risk of retreading the same ground long after the magic's gone. Just as actors or writers drift away from those other mediums, so can players—the actors and writers of a D&D game. Games stagnate when the established world becomes too precious, when the DM and players let the story meander too long without a change in tone, or when they're reluctant to let go of cherished characters and settings.

World-shaking events force conflict. They set new events and power groups in motion and cause things to happen. Their outcomes change the definition of

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WHEN NOT TO USE THEM

In constructing a narrative, beware of "false action," or action for its own sake. False action doesn't move a story forward, engage characters, or cause them to change. Many action movies (and RPG campaigns) suffer from false action, in which car chases, gunfights, and explosions abound but do little more than inconvenience the characters and eventually bore the audience with their repetition and dearth of meaningful stakes. Thus, it's probably not in the DM's best interest to shake up the world every single time there's a lull in the action, lest world-shaking events become rote and ordinary.

As a general rule, use up to three large-scale, world-shaking events over the course of a campaign—one near the beginning, one near the middle, and one near the end. Use as many small-scale world-shaking events as you like—events that shake the bounded microcosms of towns, villages, tribes, fiefs, duchies, provinces, and so forth. Every significant event shakes someone's world, after all, no matter how small that world might be. Let the unexpected and terrible regularly afflict the world's smaller territories, but unless your story demands it, save the large-scale map-spanning events for the biggest, most important moments of your campaign.

the D&D game world by altering the feel and tone of the setting in a meaningful way. They chronicle the story of your world in big, bold print. Change—especially change that occurs as a result of the characters' actions—keeps the story moving. If change is imperceptible, the actions of the characters lack significance. When the world becomes reliable, it's time to shake things up.

When to Use Them

World-shaking events can happen at any time in a campaign or story arc, but the biggest incidents tend to naturally fall at the beginning, middle, and end.

They fall there because that's the way dramatic stories work. At the beginning of a story, something happens to shake the protagonists' world and spur them into action. The characters take action to resolve their problems, but other forces oppose them. As they near their goal, a major conflict disrupts the characters' plans, shaking their world again; failure seems imminent. At the end of the story, they succeed or fail, and the world is shaken again by the way the characters changed it for good or ill.

That's (very) basic story structure. As applied to a D&D campaign: At the beginning of a campaign, world-shaking events make good adventure hooks and affect the characters' lives directly. In the middle, they make great turning points as the characters' fortunes reverse—rising after a defeat or falling after a victory. Near the end of a campaign, they serve as excellent climactic episodes with far-reaching effects; they might even occur after the story has ended, as a result of the characters' actions.

Where to Use Them

A world-shaking event affects the characters' world in a significant way. The characters' world is the primary area of the campaign setting where the characters' stories unfold. Even if your setting map is as expansive as the one for the Forgotten Realms campaign setting, for the purposes of this article "world" refers to the boundaries of the territory familiar to the characters and the places that hold the most significance for them—their sphere of influence. As the campaign progresses, the characters' world expands.

The borders of the characters' world might begin as small as an isolated keep on a forest-shrouded hill and grow to be as large as a realm, continent, planet, the Material Plane, or the entire multiverse, depending on the scale of your campaign's story. Unless you decide otherwise, a world-shaking event always applies to the current parameters of the characters' world.

World-Shaking Events

You can use this section for ideas and inspiration to fill in world-shaking events already occurring—or soon to occur—within your world, or you can roll on the tables below to randomly generate an event. The attempt to justify a random result can often reveal interesting and unforeseen possibilities.

Each world-shaking event lists examples from real world history to provide a common perspective, but you will no doubt think of dozens of your favorite fantasy-fiction equivalents for each event as you go.

A number of bullet points follow the description of each world-shaking event. These should provide you with some concrete ideas from which to build. After you've considered these points, you should have a basic foundation from which to create adventure hooks, rumors, and news items to attract the characters' attention or to inspire your own further world-building. Always consider the ways in which a world-shaking event might personally impact one or more of the characters.

To get started, select a world-shaking event category or roll 1d10 on the World-Shaking Events table. Then see the corresponding listing for that event.

WORLD-SHAKING EVENTS

d10	Event
1	Rise of a Leader or Era
2	Fall of a Leader or Era
3	Cataclysmic Disaster
4	Invasion or Assault
5	Rebellion, Revolution, Overthrow
6	Extinction, Depletion
7	New World Order
8	Discovery, Expansion, Invention
9	Prediction, Omen, Prophecy
10	Myth and Legend

If you're not sure where you'd like the event to take place, or you'd like to determine it randomly, use the "Zoom and Scale" suggestion in the "Group World-Shaking" section toward the end of this article (feel free to do this exercise solo).

1–2. Rise or Fall of a Leader or Era

Augustus Caesar. Elizabeth I. Mahatma Gandhi. Alexander the Great. Albert Einstein. William Shakespeare. Al Capone.

Eras are often defined by the prominent leaders, innovators, and tyrants of the day. These people shake the world in the places they call home and etch their signatures indelibly on the pages of history. When they rise to power, they impact the time and place where they live in monumental ways. When they fall from power or pass away, the ghost of their presence lingers.

Political Leaders: At the broadest scale, political leaders are emperors, kings, queens, and princes; at the smallest, they are chieftains, reeves, mayors, or elders on a village council.

Religious Leaders: At the broadest scale, religious leaders are deities' avatars and high priests of entire religions; at the smallest, the heads of local cloisters.

Military Leaders: At the broadest scale, military leaders control the armed forces of nations. They might be military dictators, the head of a king's war council, or they could be kings or emperors themselves. At the smallest scale, they are the heads of local militias, gangs, and other martial brotherhoods.

Criminal and Underworld Leaders: At the broadest scale, a criminal or underworld leader controls the world and its leaders through a shadow network of spies, bribes, and black market trade. On the smallest scale, these are local gang bosses, pirate captains, and brigand chiefs.

Leaders in Art and Culture: At the broadest scale, a leader in art or culture is a virtuoso whose work reflects the spirit of the age and changes the way people think—a prominent playwright, bard, or king's fool in whose words, art, or performance the people perceive universal truth. At the smallest scale, this might be an influential local poet, minstrel, satirist, or sculptor.

Leaders in Philosophy, Learning, or Magic: At the broadest scale, a leader in philosophy, learning, or magic is a genius philosopher, a counselor to emperors, an enlightened one, the head of the highest institution of learning in the world, or an archmage; at the smallest, this person might be a local sage, seer, hedge wizard, wise woman, or teacher.

Determine the kind of leader that influences the new or passing era. You can select a leader type from the list, roll 1d6 to determine a random leader type, or choose a different type that fits your campaign.

PHILOSOPHY, LEARNING, ART, AND CULTURE

Since D&D doesn't usually spotlight the artistic, cultural, or philosophical elements of the setting, you might find it challenging to choose a leader in philosophy/learning/magic or art/culture and to determine that person's influence upon the world. You might not have considered such figures in your campaign world. If that's the case, this is a good opportunity for world-building, adding a prominent figure in one of those arenas and thinking about the influence that person has, or had, upon the world. Not only does this type of detail help realize your world, it creates potential NPCs for the learned characters in your campaign (such as bards, wizards, monks, clerics, and any other characters tied to education, learning, philosophy, art, or culture) to interact with.

The characters in your campaign are the heroes, but who is the Aristotle, Sophocles, William Shakespeare, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, or Charles Darwin of your world? Or to frame things in a modern context, who is the Stephen Spielberg, Bob Dylan, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, or Stephen King of your world?

On the other hand, if you're having trouble coming up with such a figure or this emphasis doesn't suit your campaign, you can choose from one of the other leader types or roll 1d4 on the Leader Types table instead.

d6	Leader Types
1	Political
2	Religious
3	Military
4	Crime/underworld
5	Art/culture
6	Philosophy/learning/magic

1. Rise of a Leader, Beginning of an Era

In dramatic stories, a new leader's rise often comes at the end of a period of struggle or turmoil. Sometimes it's a war or uprising, other times an election, the death of a tyrant, a prophecy fulfilled, or the appointment of a hero. Conversely, the new leader might be a tyrant, a fiend, or black-hearted villain, and the era that just ended could have been one of peace, tranquility, and justice.

World-Shaking Event: GENESIS!
A new leader shakes the foundations of your campaign world and begins a new era in the region you've decided upon. How does this person or this era begin to affect the world?

- Name one thing that has been consistently true about the world, which is now no longer true due to this leader's rise or influence. This is the biggest change that occurs when the new leader takes power and might become the prevailing trait that defines the era, for which it is remembered.
- Name the person (or people) whose death, defeat, or loss opened the door for this leader to take power. This might be a military defeat, the overthrow of old ideas, a cultural rebirth, or something else. Who died, lost, or was defeated? What weren't they willing to compromise? Was the new leader complicit in the death, defeat, or loss, or was the opportunity serendipitous?
- Despite his or her many virtues or flaws, one flaw in the new leader in particular outrages a certain percentage of the populace. What is that flaw? What person or group of persons will do their utmost to foil this leader because of it? Conversely, what is this leader's greatest virtue?
- Who believes in this leader now, but still retains some doubts? This is someone close to the leader, who has their trust and knows their secret fears, doubts, or vices.

2. Death of a Leader, End of an Era

All that begins must end. With the fall of kings and queens, the maps of the world are redrawn, laws change, customs and cultures alter. The fall of a tribal warlord means one thing to the larger powers attempting to tame the land under one rule, and something entirely different to the tribe he ruled. When these people lived, they shaped their civilization and their culture. When they passed on, the world wasn't the same for their absence. The attitude of the inhabitants shifts subtly at first and then changes dramatically as the people look back or reminisce about the time before.

World-Shaking Event: KINGKILLER!
Kill off one of your world's leaders. This might be a benevolent ruler, an influential citizen, or even one of the characters' minor adversaries. How does the death of this person affect those formerly under his or her influence?

- Name one positive change that the leader brought to his or her domain or sphere of influence. Does that change persist after the leader's death?
- State the general mood or attitude of the people under this person's power. What important fact didn't they realize about this person or his or her reign, which will later come to light?
- Name one person or group that tries (and fails) to fill the leader's shoes in the resulting power vacuum.
- Name one person or group that plotted against this leader.
- Name three things for which this leader will be remembered.

3. Cataclysmic Disaster

The Black Death. The Great Flood. The eruption of Mount Vesuvius. The Chernobyl disaster. The Shaanxi Earthquake.

Earthquake, famine, fire, plague, flood—disasters on a grand scale can eradicate whole civilizations suddenly and without warning. They redraw maps, destroy economies, and alter worlds. Sometimes the survivors rebuild from the ruins. The Great Chicago Fire, for instance, provided an opportunity to rebuild the city according to a modern plan. Most of the time the disaster leaves only ruins—buried under ash like Pompeii, or sunk beneath the waves like mythical Atlantis.

Not every disaster on the table might make immediate sense in the context of your campaign world. A flood in the desert? A volcanic eruption on grassy plains? If you select a disaster that conflicts with your setting, challenge yourself to justify it. Perhaps the desert oasis floods with sand or a miraculous downpour turns the world to mud; an Underdark volcano erupts beneath the grassy plains, dissolving the surface of the world, creating earthquakes and swallowing cities whole.

With two exceptions, the disasters on the table below resemble those that affect our own world. Think of planar warps and magic gone awry like nuclear incidents—they're big events that unnaturally alter the land (and probably the way reality works). They might transform the land and its people or warp them in context with the nature of the plane.

Divine judgment is something else entirely. It's whatever you want it to be. But it's always a big, bold, unsubtle sign of a deity's wrath or displeasure.

World-Shaking Event: APOCALYPSE!
Choose a place in your world and wipe it off the map. A disaster ravages the land and effectively eliminates a place the characters once knew. It's a good idea to preserve one or two survivors to tell the characters what happened, but be sure that there's a cost and that the characters feel the depth of the catastrophe. You can elect one of the following cataclysmic disasters or roll 1d10 to determine it randomly.

d10	Cataclysmic Disasters
1	Earthquake
2	Famine/drought
3	Fire
4	Flood
5	Plague/disease
6	Rain of fire (meteoric impact)
7	Storm (hurricane, tornado, tsunami)
8	Volcanic eruption
9	Magic gone awry/planar warp
10	Divine judgment

- Decide what caused this cataclysmic disaster and where (specifically) it originated.
- An omen presaged this event, or a series of signs and omens. Describe the omen in detail.
- Describe or name the creature that warned the populace about the oncoming disaster. Who listened?
- Who were the lucky (or unlucky) ones who survived?
- Describe what the area looks like after the disaster in contrast to how it looked before.

4. Invasion or Assault

The siege of Troy. The Viking invasions. The Norman conquest of Britain. The Sack of Rome. The Crusades. The Mongol invasion.

One of the most common world-shaking events, an invasion occurs when one group forcibly takes over another—usually by military strength, but also by infiltration and occupation.

An assault differs from an invasion in that the attacking force is not necessarily interested in occupation or taking power. On the other hand, an assault might be the first step of an invasion.

As a world-shaking event, an assault or invasion makes a definitive impact. It can't be just another military action—regardless of the scale, the incursion stands out because its repercussions change the characters' world and its effects resonate long after the initial attack or takeover.

World-Shaking Event: ATTACK!
Part of your campaign world is attacked or invaded. Depending on the current scale of your campaign, the area might be as small as a section of a city or as large as a continent, world, or plane of existence.

Define the aggressor. You'll probably have a good idea of the threats that already pose a danger to the area you've chosen. You can also use the following table to determine the aggressor.

d10	Invading Forces
1	A criminal enterprise
2	A known or familiar enemy
3	A monster type (fey, undead) or unique monster
4	A parasitic life form
5	A past adversary reawakened, reborn, resurgent
6	A previously unknown threat
7	A rogue faction
8	A savage tribe
9	A secret society
10	A traitorous ally

- Name one key element of the invasion or assault that the defenders didn't expect or something they couldn't repel.
- Something happened to the first defenders to stand against the invasion or assault—something no one likes to talk about. What was it?
- The attackers or invaders had a motive for their action that wasn't obvious or understood at first. What was it?
- Who turned traitor, and at what point did they turn? Why did they do it? Did an attacker try to stop the incursion, or did a prominent defender throw in with the invaders?

5. Rebellion, Revolution, Overthrow

Caesar's March on Rome. Boudicca's uprising. The English Civil War. The French Revolution. The Velvet Revolution.

Dissatisfied with the current order, a person or group of people overturns the dominant regime and takes over—or fails to take over. Regardless of the result, a revolution (even an attempted one) can shake the world and shape the destiny of nations.

In a medieval fantasy world, revolutions are often bloody and brutal—but they need not always be. Non-violent revolutions or overthrows (such as the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989) can occur as the result of a vote or mass protest.

The scale of a revolution need not involve the common masses against the nobility. A revolution can be as small as a merchants' guild revolting against its leadership or a church overthrowing its priesthood in favor of a new creed. The spirits of the forest might attempt to overthrow the forces of civilization in a nearby city that cut down trees for timber. Alternatively, the scale can be as dramatic as humanity rising to overthrow the gods.

World-Shaking Event: USURPERS!
Pick a power group in your current campaign and name (or invent) a group that opposes it, fomenting revolution.

- Name three things the rebels want or hope to achieve. These are their goals.
- The rebels achieve a victory against those they wish to overthrow, even if it's a pyrrhic victory. Which of their three goals do they achieve? How long is this achievement likely to last?
- State the cost exacted upon the prior establishment after their fall from power. Who from the previous establishment remains in power during the next regime? If the previous establishment remains in power, describe one way that they punish the revolutionaries.
- One of the rebellion's prominent leaders—in some respects the face of the revolution—was driven by a personal reason for his or her part in events. Describe this person and state the true reason he or she led the rebellion.
- What problem existed before the revolution that persists in spite of it?

6. Extinction, Depletion

The dinosaurs. Mammoths. Smilodon. The dodo bird. Deforestation. Glacial thaw. Ghost towns. Racial cleansing.

Something is gone from the campaign world that once existed. This might be a variety of plant, a precious resource (such as platinum, mithral, or adamantine), an animal species or the wild game of a region, or an entire race or culture of people. This element or creature is hunted or exploited to extinction, or else suffers some other fate that eliminates it from this part of the world, leaving behind little but its memory. Its absence causes a chain reaction that affects every creature that uses or relies upon it.

World-Shaking Event: ANNIHILATION!
Choose a location or area in your campaign world and eliminate something that previously existed there. On a small scale, the last of a family dynasty passes away or a once-thriving mining town in the region dries up and becomes a ghost town. On a grand scale, magic dies, the last dragon is slain, or the last of the fey departs the world.

What is gone from the world—or the region of the world you've chosen—that once existed there? If the answer isn't immediately evident, consult the following table for ideas.

d8	Annihilated, Depleted, Extinct
1	A kind of animal (insect, bird, fish, livestock)
2	Habitable land
3	Magic or magic-users (witchcraft, sorcerers, illusion)
4	A mineral resource (gems, metals, ore)
5	A type of monster (unicorn, manticore, catoblepas)
6	A people (family line, clan, culture, race)
7	A kind of plant (crop, tree, herb, forest)
8	A waterway (river, lake, ocean)

- Name a territory, race, or type of creature that relied upon the thing that was lost. How do they compensate? What do they attempt to substitute for that which was lost?
- Who were the persons or creatures—or what was the phenomenon—most accountable for the loss?
- Describe an immediate consequence of the loss. Guess at the future and describe one way that the loss impacts or changes the world in the long term.
- Who or what suffers the most as a result of the loss? Who or what benefits the most from the loss?

7. New World Order

The founding of Rome. The Knights Templar. The East India Company. The Ku Klux Klan. The Nazi Party. The C.I.A.

The foundation of a new order, kingdom, religion, society, cabal, or cult can shake the world with its actions, doctrine, dogma, and policies. On a local scale, a new order contends with the existing power groups, influencing, subverting, dominating, or allying with them to create a stronger base of power. Large and powerful organizations can exert enough influence to rule the world. Some new organizations benefit the populace, while others grow to threaten the civilization they once protected.

World-Shaking Event: FOUNDATION!
In the part of the world you choose, an important new order arises. It could have humble beginnings or auspicious ones, but one thing is certain: It is destined to change the world as long as it progresses along its present course. Sometimes an organization's alignment is apparent from inception, but a new order's morality can remain ambiguous until its doctrines, dogma, policies, and tradition reveal themselves over time. Choose the type of organization that is founded, or use the table below to generate ideas.

d10	New Order
1	Crime syndicate/bandit organization
2	Guild (masons, apothecaries, goldsmiths)
3	Magical circle/brotherhood/society
4	Military/knightly order
5	New family dynasty/tribe/clan
6	Philosophy/discipline dedicated to a principle/ideal
7	Realm (stead, village, town, duchy, kingdom)
8	Religion/sect/denomination
9	School/university
10	Secret society/cult/cabal

- At its inception, the new order supplants a current power group in the world, whether by accident or by design, taking away territory, converts, or defectors and aggressively reducing the previous power group's numbers. Who or what does the foundation of this new order supplant?
- The foundation of the new order appeals to a specific audience. Decide whether this order attracts a certain race (such as elf, human, orc, yuan-ti), social class (commoner, merchant, soldier, nobility), or adventuring class (fighters, clerics, thieves).
- The leader of this new order is known for a particular quality valued by his or her followers. Choose one of the six standard ability scores: Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma. The ability you choose is the quality that the followers most respect and admire about their leader. Elaborate as to why they respect him or her for this quality, and what actions this leader has taken to garner the followers' support.
- A rival group openly or secretly opposes the foundation of this new order. Choose an existing power group from your campaign to oppose the new order or create one from the categories on the table above. Decide why they oppose the new order, who leads them, and what they plan to do to stop the new order.

8. Discovery, Expansion, Invention

The wheel. The longbow. The printing press. The New World. The atom. The Gold Rush. King Tut's tomb. Cloning.

New discoveries change the world. Discoveries of new lands expand the map and change the boundaries of empires. Discoveries of new magic or technology expand the boundaries of what was once thought possible. New resources or archaeological finds create opportunity and wealth and set prospectors and power groups in motion to vie for their control.

World-Shaking Event: EUREKA!
A new discovery—or rediscovery—impacts your campaign world in a meaningful way, shaping the course of history and the events of the age. Think of this discovery as a big adventure hook or series of hooks. This is also an opportunity to create a unique monster, item, god, plane, or race for your world. It doesn't have to be wholly original, just flavored for your campaign. The important thing is to make the discovery matter. Discoveries make great MacGuffins to write adventure hooks around or send your villains after.

Decide on the type of discovery that is made or use the Discoveries table to generate ideas. Once you

have determined the type of discovery, flesh it out on paper a little by deciding exactly what it is, who discovered it, and what potential effect it could have on the world. Ideally, previous adventures in your campaign will help you fill in the blanks. Then proceed to the bullet points.

d10	Discoveries
1	Ancient ruin/lost city of a legendary race
2	Animal/monster/magical mutation
3	Invention/technology/magic (helpful or destructive)
4	New (or forgotten) god or planar entity
5	New (or rediscovered) artifact or religious relic
6	New land (island, continent, lost world, demiplane)
7	Otherworldly object (planar gate, spelljammer)
8	People (race, tribe, lost civilization, or colony)
9	Plant (miracle herb, fungal parasite, sentient plant)
10	Resource or wealth (gold, gems, mithral)

- This discovery benefits a particular person, group, or faction more than others. Who benefits most? Name three benefits they stand to gain from this discovery.
- This discovery directly harms another person, group, or faction. Who is harmed the most? Who else will suffer?
- This discovery creates a series of repercussions or unforeseen/unintended side effects. Name three repercussions or side effects. Who ignores the repercussions?
- Name two or three individuals or factions struggling to possess or control this discovery. Who is likely to win? What do they stand to gain, and what are they willing to do to control it?

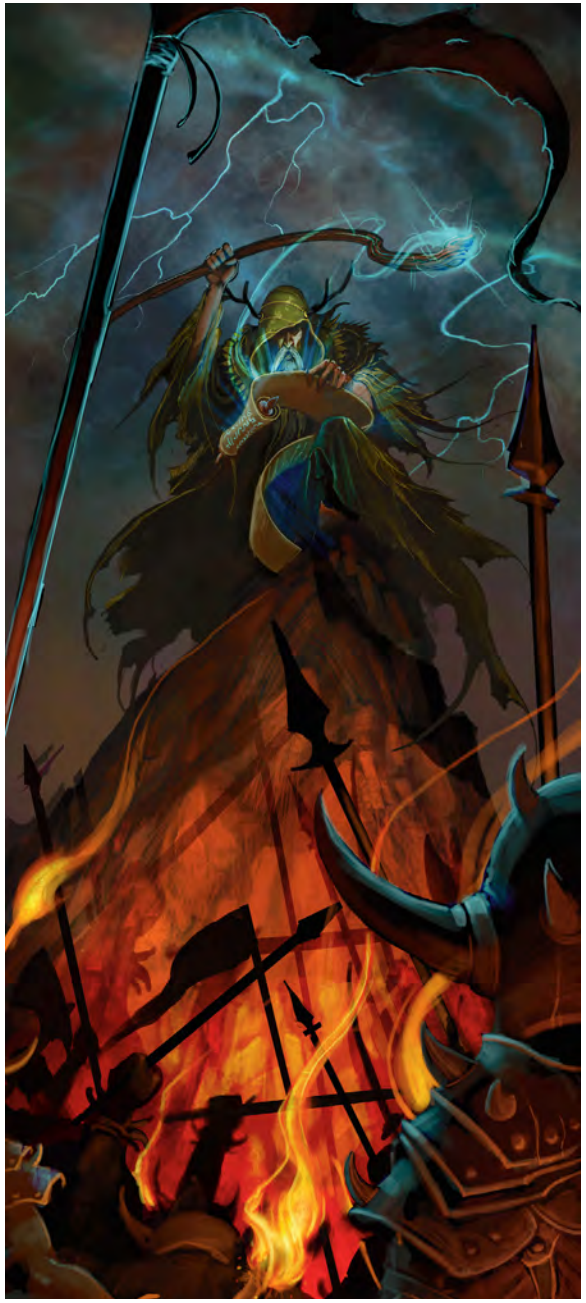
9. Prediction, Omen, Prophecy

The Mayan calendar. Soothsayers to Oedipus and Caesar. The Book of Revelation. Nostradamus. Joseph Smith.

Sometimes the foretelling of a world-shaking event becomes a world-shaking event in and of itself: omens that predict the fall of empires, the doom of races, and the end of the world. Sometimes an omen points to change for the good—a legendary hero or messiah—but the most dramatic prophecies warn of future tragedies and predict dark ages. Unlike other world-shaking events, the outcome doesn't happen immediately. Instead, individuals or factions work to fulfill or avert the prophecy according to how it will affect them. The prophecy's helpers or hinderers are the forces that create adventure hooks in the campaign by the actions they take. A prophecy should foretell a big event on a grand scale, since it will take time to come true (or be averted).

World-Shaking Event: DOOM!
A world-shaking prophecy comes to light. If events continue on their present course, the prophecy will come true and the world will change dramatically as a result. Don't shy away from making this prophecy both significant and alarming.

- Create a prophecy that foretells a major change to the campaign world. You can build one from scratch using ideas from the current campaign or roll 1d8 on the World-Shaking Events table at the beginning of this article (ignoring results of prophecies and legendary events). If you use the World-Shaking Events table, answer the follow-up questions for the event you've chosen in order to fill in details about the future. Then continue with the following bullet points.
- Write a list of three to five (or more) omens that will occur before the prophecy comes to pass.



You can use events that have already occurred in the campaign, placing the prophecy in mid-completion. The rest are events that might or might not happen, depending on the actions of the characters.

- Describe the person or creature that discovered the prophecy and how it was found. What did this creature gain by revealing it? What did this person lose or sacrifice?
- Describe the individual or faction (or divine or planar power) that supports the prophecy and works to ensure that it's fulfilled, and the one that will do all in its power to avert it. What is the first step each takes to fulfill or avert it? Who suffers for their efforts?
- One part of the prophecy is wrong. Choose one of the omens you listed or one of the bulleted questions you answered for the world-shaking event that the omen predicts. The omen is false, and if applicable, its opposite is true instead.

10. Myth and Legend

The sinking of Atlantis. Ragnarok. The Trojan War. The fall of Camelot. The Rapture. The death of the sun.

Sometimes a world-shaking event takes on mythic or legendary proportions. If wars, plagues, discoveries, and the like can be called "regular" world-shaking events, these are the events that exceed and surpass them, the ones that come along only once a millennium (if ever) and shape the world's mythic outlook for all time to come. These wildcard events change a region or the whole world on a grand scale.

World-Shaking Event: EPIC!
A truly extraordinary event changes your world on a fundamental level. Think big. Think on a grand scale. This event might occur at the fulfillment of an ancient or long-forgotten prophecy, it might be an act of divine intervention. The story of this event will be passed down from generation to generation and it will directly impact the player characters in the campaign.

Once again, your current campaign probably provides a few ideas for what this could be. If you need inspiration, roll 1d8 on the World-Shaking Events table (ignoring results of prophecies and legendary events). Answer the bullet points, but magnify the result to the grandest scale you can imagine:

The rise and fall of kings and eras is the birth and death of gods and ages . . . or worlds. Cataclysmic disasters are world-spanning deluges, ice ages, and zombie apocalypse. Assaults and invasions are world wars, demonic armies, titanic monsters, and final clashes between the forces of light and darkness, with the world as their battleground. Rebellions dethrone gods and raise new demon lords. Extinctions wipe entire peoples from the face of existence. New orders are world-spanning empires or pantheons of new gods; discoveries are doomsday devices and portals to eldritch dimensions where cosmic horrors wait.

Group World-Shaking

There's something to be said for the DM having total control over the world, holding on to the world's secrets, doling them out piecemeal as the characters work their way through the campaign. That style of play keeps the players in suspense from episode to episode as they learn about the world and try to discover what the bad guys are up to. That element of suspense is one of the benefits of having a single DM in charge of the game and story.

Some games can benefit from group storytelling when all the players cooperate to shape the events of the world outside what their characters can personally affect. D&D can work as such a game: During character creation, the DM asks a player for the background of his or her character. When the player replies, "I'm the last in a line of necromancers," the player has created a (potentially very large) part of the world and future adventures.

Similarly, you can involve the players in helping to shape the world-shaking events that occur, and in which they—as participants in the unfolding story—are already invested. You'll often find that several heads are better than one, and the players will provide details about the world that were important to them but which you as DM might have overlooked or whose significance you undervalued. This helps spark player investment, since their contributions have real impact on the fate of the world their characters tread.

It has been said that in D&D, the DM is God. In this exercise, the DM is rather more the head of a pantheon of deities (the players) who determine the world-shaking events that will occur.

After they have their turn as gods, the players inhabit the bodies of mortal bystanders and witnesses that took part in, or survived, the world-shaking event.

1. Zoom and Scale

First, choose the part of the world where the world-shaking event will occur. This should either be a place that immediately affects events in your campaign, or somewhere on the border where future events will spill over into the campaign.

If you'd like to determine the location randomly, start by dividing your campaign map into sections. The campaign map is the sum total of the world where your current campaign takes place. It's simplest if you divide the world into four equal quadrants. Number the quadrants one through four and ask a player to roll a d4. The result is both the quadrant of the world that's affected and the scale of the event.

As a general rule, zoom in at least twice for a low-level campaign and once for a mid-level campaign. For a high-level campaign, you probably don't need to zoom at all; the event impacts the world and very likely the planes beyond.

Ask the players if they're happy with the scale or if they want to narrow the focus a little. Majority rules, but the DM has final say (try to say yes unless doing so would irreparably destroy your story). If you agree that the focus is too broad, divide that section into quadrants again and have the next player roll a d4. Zoom in from there. Repeat until you're satisfied with the scope of the area where the event will occur.

2. The Main Event

The main event is about deciding what happens and learning the specifics of the world-shaking event. First, tell the players the general information about the area they've selected.

- Who lives there?
- Who's in power?
- What are the area's main problems?

Now unleash a world-shaking event upon the region and decide among yourselves what happens. You can roll 1d10 randomly on the World-Shaking events table or choose a specific event.

Explain the nature of the event to the players (you can read the description if you wish).

Each of the world-shaking events contains follow-up bullet points. Go around the table asking each player to answer one of the bullet points in turn. If there are more players than bullet points, the additional players are automatically cast as witnesses (see below). If you have fewer players than points, keep going around until all the questions have been answered.

3. Witnesses

A world-shaking event is meaningless if it affects no one. It's important to understand the ramifications and aftereffects on the populace if the event is to be important to the story.

World War Z by Max Brooks is a science-fiction novel comprised of various perspectives revolving around a single world-shaking event—the zombie war. Some of the characters are doctors, some are military, some are scientists, some are smugglers and con men. All of these contrasting perspectives combine to create a multifaceted view of the event. You'll do the same with yours.

Using the information you gleaned from the bullet points, each event will be described by one class of witness:

- The common folk
- The ruling class
- The neighbors

The first player chooses which class of people he or she will play. Ask the player to take a moment to think about and then describe the character that witnessed the event. Then, from that character's point of view, the player describes at least three details that this person witnessed. If the player is up to it, encourage him or her to take a few minutes to tell the story of the day that the event happened, incorporating those three details.

The next player does the same, taking on the role of a character from one of the other classes, describing three details that person notices, and recounting the event. A third player follows suit for the remaining class. In the end, you'll have a detailed description of the event from three different perspectives.

The perspectives don't need to match, and statements of fact can conflict. The characters should have different perspectives on the event. Typically the common folk feel a world-shaking event acutely, with the ruling class being more detached, and the neighbors lending a distant view—though this isn't always true.

The only requirement is that the answers to the bullet points remain consistent. When offering these alternative perspectives, players must honor the group's initial answers to the bullet points, add to them, and supply new details.

The idea is to experience the event from all sides and the way it affects the people of the world. This way, when the characters take the stage, the players are already invested. As a bonus, they've also generated key nonplayer characters, world details, and possibly even adventure hooks to which they're already attached by virtue of having created them.

About the Author

Steve Townshend is an award-winning RPG designer whose work includes *Monster Vault™: Threats to the Nentir Vale™*, *Madness at Gardmore Abbey™*, and *Heroes of the Feywild™*. Prior to his RPG design work, Steve was a professional actor whose primary concentrations were Shakespeare, Meisner technique, and long form improvisation. This past career and training strongly influences his work in roleplaying games and short fiction.

Unearthed Arcana: Time Travel

By Robert J. Schwalb

Illustrations by Dan Scott and Ralph Horsley

You don't have to look hard to come across a story involving time travel. We find the plot device in many genres of books, films, and comics. Although science fiction leans heaviest on time travel—killer robots sent back to terminate the mother of a dangerous revolutionary, starships that slingshot around the sun to kidnap a few whales to save the future, time lords who muck about with the future and the past in a police box—fantasy is not above using time travel to tell stories, even if the past to which the characters travel is more fantastical than ours.

The D&D game has frequently dabbled in time travel, both as a story hook and as a mechanical device. Campaigns creak and groan under the weight of the shenanigans of a clever player with the tools needed to go back and make a few revisions to history to create a less troublesome present. And yet time travel has left an indelible stamp on the game. This article digs into the concepts of time travel, giving you a few tools so player characters can move through time as well as space.

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A Problem of Time

Fundamentally, time travel already exists in D&D. Time passes in the game. The DM controls time flow to manage the story, speeding it up and slowing it down. A DM accelerates time when narrating what happens over the course of days or weeks, such as an ocean voyage, and decelerates it to six-second increments with a call for initiative. Time, then, is as much a part of the imaginary universe as it is of the real world.

But time travel is more than watching sand fall through an hourglass, more than the piled-up hours and days spent traveling to the next dungeon. Time travel, in the fantastical sense, is the ability to travel from one point in time to another, either forward or backward, without changing physical location.

SCI-FI IN MY FANTASY

D&D is no stranger to time travel. The most famous example from D&D fiction is in the Dragonlance Legends trilogy, when Tasslehoff Burrfoot and his buddy Caramon Majere traveled back in time to just before the Cataclysm. Would it surprise you to learn that Greyhawk's Murlynd, of the eponymous spoon, wore a duster and carried a pair of six-shooters?

The Complete Psionics Handbook (2nd Edition), by Steve Winter, made time travel explicitly possible with *time shift*. Rich Baker, in *The Will and the Way* (also 2nd Edition), gave us *time duplicate*, *time dilation*, and the campaign-bending *time travel* powers. And then there's Loren Coleman's *Chronomancer* (2nd Edition). The Time Bender paragon path from *Player's Handbook 3* (4th Edition) is another example.

A note for the scientists out there: we're talking about fantasy time travel. Although some concepts here draw inspiration from science, in no way is this article beholden to physics. Einstein might have been right about space-time, and quantum physics could offer clues about how reality works. But in D&D worlds, gods might control or manipulate time, and magic can and does do the same.

Time Lines

One way to think about time is to imagine it as a braided line with no beginning and no end. The braids are all the objects in reality woven together to form the line. The line represents all the moments in time. One point might be the Dawn War. Another might be when the sun swells up and swallows the world.

Although there is a sequence of events on the time line, all moments occur simultaneously. People perceive time flowing in a single direction, but past and future are relative to one's position on the time line. Outside time, one can arbitrarily choose any moment as the present and pick out the various decisions that led to the occurrences at that moment. Since one has an infinite number of points to choose from, all moments can be the present.

Look at any published campaign setting that has an established, written time line. That time line tells when key events occur and shows how they inform future events. The time line might have a beginning (the earliest known moment) and an ending (the point where the designers expect the DM to start a campaign). Just because the future hasn't been formally written doesn't mean it doesn't exist. The end point marks the spot where you fill in what happens next.

More important, a world's time line also provides interesting moments in which a group can set their campaign. Just because the book suggests a starting date doesn't mean you have to use that date. You could run Dragonlance in the years leading up to the Cataclysm, or Greyhawk during the great migrations, or Dark Sun during the rise of the sorcerer-kings. The point on the time line that the group chooses to explore becomes the present, and everything that happens in the game adds definition to that period and, perhaps, future times.

The decision made at the start of the campaign can be made again at any point by introducing time travel as a story tool. A campaign might begin at one time, go back 250 years, and then jump ahead 1,000 years.

Causality and Paradoxes

Events have causes. One event causes a second, which causes a third, and so on, building a chain of events.

Causality creates all sorts of problems in time travel games, largely because modification of any event can cause everything following the altered event to change. All dependent events transform, perhaps disappearing altogether. At best, this activity alters the future. At worst, it creates a paradox that breaks the time line.

For example, let's say that Strahd von Zarovich is the first vampire in the world. We know Strahd becomes a vampire after being spurned by a young woman named Tatyana with whom he became infatuated. Turning to dark powers to overcome death, Strahd murdered his brother Sergei on his wedding day and drove Sergei's bride-to-be, the young Tatyana, to throw herself from the castle walls. Strahd, the castle, and the town below all were sucked into a Domain of Dread. Strahd became a bad guy.

But what happens if a clever adventurer, after running afoul of the Ancient One, decides to step through a time portal to the point when Strahd is a young man? The character might convince Strahd to seek a life of peace. Maybe the character shows young Strahd what he will one day become. Perhaps the character kills Strahd. If the time traveler succeeds, Strahd might never build Castle Ravenloft, never invite Sergei to stay with him, never meet Tatyana, and thus never make a pact with dark powers. Strahd,

then, doesn't become a vampire and, if we accept that he was the first, no vampires exist in the world. This situation also creates a paradox. If no vampiric Strahd exists, why did the character go back in time?

This paradox brings to mind the most famous time travel paradox of all. What happens when you go back in time and kill your own grandfather? Do you cease to be? And if you cease to be, why is your grandfather dead? Paradox is a problem you should solve before throwing open the gates to time travel. Luckily, some possible solutions are forthcoming.

Fixed Points

Sometimes history can't be changed. What would the world of Greyhawk be without the Rain of Colorless Fire or the Battle of Emridy Meadows? Can you imagine the Forgotten Realms without Drizzt or Elminster? Without Huma defeating Takhisis in Dragonlance, everything that comes after just unravels. These events and individuals are effectively fixed points on the time line, and their influence on what comes after is integral to the fabric of reality. Removing them or altering them would cause vast, reality-shaking ripples that would change so much, the time line would snap. Nature or whatever god or gods oversee time in your world move in to protect the time line and ensure that individuals or their proxies survive and that events happen more or less as they are supposed to.

Making something a fixed point helps you preserve the integrity of your campaign setting, ensuring that one trip into the past doesn't spawn paradoxes or undo everything that happened up to that point. That said, making a fixed point doesn't mean that the characters cannot go back to witness those events or interact with the people involved. It means that circumstances change to absorb their actions so that what is supposed to happen still happens.

Back to the Strahd example above: Strahd becoming a vampire could be a fixed point. But how could this event happen if Strahd is killed before he turns? Perhaps Sergei takes his place. Sergei becomes the bloodthirsty general, and each victory the elder brother won becomes Sergei's to win. After campaigning for several years, a bitter, scarred, and broken man builds Castle Ravenloft. In the village, he notices Tatyana and feels that they belong together, but the young woman has eyes for someone else. She feels affection for Sergei, but they can never be together. Sergei offers to host the wedding at the castle, makes a pact with dark powers, and kills the groom. His act drives Tatyana to kill herself. Overwhelmed by what he has become, the vampire assumes his dead brother's identity and passes the centuries brooding in his castle.

In fact, the Strahd the characters know might always have been Sergei, or perhaps they stopped Strahd from becoming a vampire, but in doing so they doomed Sergei to take his place. Fate adapts to changes and preserves the future so that it occurs with few significant alterations.

Alternative Time Lines

The idea of alternative mortal worlds (or Material Planes) is nothing new to D&D multiverse. The planar cosmology presented the idea that the world was just one of many possible worlds from the start. From the worlds Lolth conquered and drew into the Demonweb Pits to the alternate versions of Oerth revealed in *Polyhedron* and further described in *Expedition to the Ruins of Greyhawk*, there might be many versions of the various worlds.

Rather than create fixed points, when characters jump to another point on the time line, they create a fork, with one branch extending into the future as it always has. The other, on which the characters find themselves, goes to a different, changeable future. A character could kill his grandfather without fear of creating a paradox. The character would not be preventing his birth but rather the birth of his duplicate in the alternative reality.

Whether it's possible for the characters to return to their original time line is up to you. It might be that whenever a character travels through time, he or she

BACKGROUND: TIME TRAVELER

You come from another time. You might have been born in the distant past or at some point in the far future. What was your life like in your time? How did you travel to the present? Do you seek to return, or is the present a refuge?

Associated Skill: History

FUTURE FUN

If you plan to use time travel to send the characters into the future, the D&D *Gamma World* game has all sorts of cool things you can mine for adventures. The cards and weird monsters offer a bevy of strange foes and stranger treasures to keep your players busy.

D&D *Gamma World* focuses on the first 10 levels, so unless you let low-level characters jump through time, be prepared to make modifications. The quick and dirty method is to add 1 to AC, defenses, attack modifiers, and ability modifiers for every 2 levels you add. For each level you add, increase damage for at-will attack powers by 1 and for limited powers by about 2 or 3.

TIME PORTAL

You throw open a portal to a different time.

Level: 20
Category: Travel
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: Special
Component Cost: 5,000 gp (see text)
Market Price: 25,000 gp, plus 10 healing surges
Key Skill: Arcana and History

You create a doorway to another time, linking the present with the past or the future. By stepping through the portal, you move to another point on the time line.

The ritual works only if you perform it within a permanent teleportation circle. The portal opens within the circle.

During the ritual's performance, make a History check. The result determines how far into the past or future you can travel.

History Check Result	Distance in Time
19 or lower	Up to 1 year
20-29	Up to 10 years
30-39	Up to 100 years
40 or higher	Any point

At the completion of this ritual, make an Arcana check. The result determines how long the portal remains open.

Arcana Check Result	Portal Duration
19 or lower	1 round
20-39	3 rounds
40 or higher	5 rounds

This ritual otherwise works the same as Linked Portal in regard to how the portal functions, how it appears, and what happens when creatures interact with it.

creates and exists in a new time line. In such a case, any return to the "present" places the characters in the alternative time line's present. On the other hand, the characters could return along the forked path and move back to their usual present. They would be in a world unchanged by their actions in the past.

Objects and Time Travel

All the problems player characters face and can potentially create by traveling through time also apply to items they take with them or bring back to the present. Imagine that one character has a magic sword. She and several others go back a century. Then a different character finds what he thinks is the sword's twin but is, in fact, the very same blade. Both characters return to the present. Who has the sword?

The first character doesn't have it because when the second character brought the weapon forward from the past, it removes the sword from the event where the first character found it. Without the sword, would the first character have been able to defeat all the enemies she defeated? How would her life have changed by not finding the sword? As you can see, merely transporting an object from one time to another risks creating a paradox.

You can solve this problem in a few ways.

Alternative Time Lines: If you use the Alternative Time Line approach, bringing an item from

another time causes no troubles in the time line the characters currently occupy. The retrieved item belongs to a different branch of time. One item is a duplicate from another time line.

Items Don't Travel: You can take a cue from the movies. When a creature travels through time, it cannot bring any object from one point in time to another. Thus, a time traveler must make the trip naked.

The Value of Time

Despite all the problems time travel can cause, it's a powerful storytelling device, and it opens your campaign in ways you might never have imagined. For example, some of the most interesting bits about the Eberron campaign setting are locked in the past. The Last War shook the world. It created a magical catastrophe that threatened to consume the planet, saw the creation of an entirely new race, and was rife with intrigue, treachery, and bloody battles. Who wouldn't want to play in that setting?

You could easily start a campaign in that time, using *The Forge of War* supplement as a guide. The period is made more interesting when viewed through the lens of the war's aftermath.

The same is true for the Dark Sun campaign setting. Many people wonder how Athas became a desert planet populated by weird monsters. Adventuring when the sorcerer-kings came to power might be a lot of fun. Knowing what's at stake creates great tension and makes adventuring in the past more meaningful.

Moving in Time

Knowing the risks and complications of time travel is just one step. How the characters travel through time is another.

The Gods: Several D&D gods have time in their portfolio and can be the catalysts for a time-traveling adventure or campaign. Pelor, for example, might move the party through time to combat a menace in the past or future. The characters could explore a lost temple of Mak Thuum Ngatha, a vile deity intent on shattering the cosmic boundaries, and stumble through a gate to another time. Chronos of the Forgotten Realms, sensing his own demise, might call powerful heroes from the future to save him. Or maybe the characters anger the mad god Zagyg, who flings them to another point on the time line.

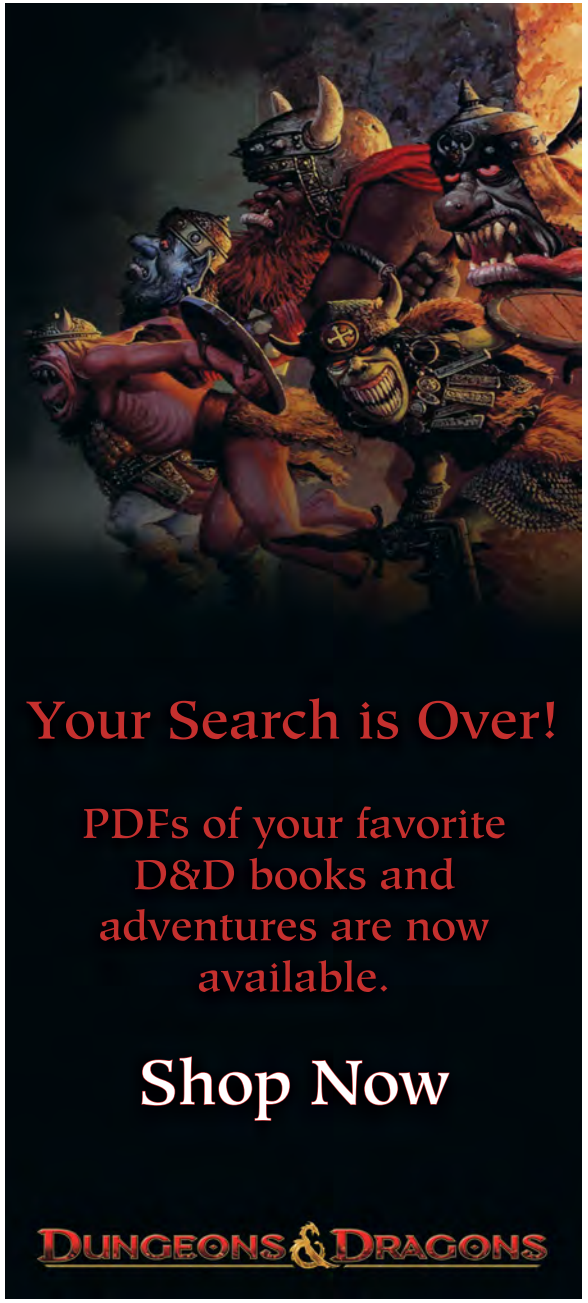
Time Anomalies: Time might pass at different rates on other planes, either faster or slower, and might even flow backward in some places. Characters who spend a few weeks in such a place return to the world of the past.

Magical Mistake: In earlier editions of the D&D game, combining or breaking certain items could lead to serious trouble. Characters who use very rare items or artifacts in reckless ways might be hurled through time, stranded in the past or future.

Time Rituals: You can empower the characters with the means to travel through time by introducing the Time Portal ritual. Although the ritual might be out of reach for most adventuring groups, a powerful ally or patron might perform it on their behalf.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is a freelance game designer and developer with a slew of works to his name. You can find more of his work in the next incarnation of D&D. You can follow Rob on Twitter (@rjschwalb), become his new best friend on Facebook, or check out his website (www.robertjschwalb.com). When not making fun, Rob spends far too much time listening to music and holding up the bar at his favorite watering hole.



Character Themes:
Ghost of the Past

By Robert van Wijk and Robert J. Schwalb

Illustrations by Adam Paquette, Julie Dillon, and Mathias Kollros

"Oh my God. I'm back. I'm home. All the time, it was . . . . We finally really did it . . . . You maniacs! You blew it up! Ah, damn you! God damn you all to hell!"
—Colonel George Taylor, *Planet of the Apes*

History litters the worlds featured in the Dungeons & Dragons® game. Old statues of people long forgotten stand in mute battle against the creepers and overgrowth. Crumbling ruins, toppled walls, and cracked buildings that are now home to the creatures of the wild still echo with the drama that once unfolded there. Even the dungeons that adventurers explore—built for reasons long lost, for purposes now inscrutable—can trace their origins back to the murky times gone by. The past is all around—in the wreckage of fallen kingdoms and empires, in the memorials raised to commemorate significant people and events, and in the names of heroes and villains that still resound through the centuries. For most, history is what has already happened—the events that have shaped the present. But for you, history was yesterday.

Born in an age far removed from the present, you were a member of the civlizations that transformed the world. You might have dwelled among the fiends of Bael Turath or the dragons of Arkhosia, taken leisurely strolls within the stunning city of Myth Drannor, or fought bravely amid the armies of the goblinoid Empire of Dhakaan. You witnessed these nations at their heights, when their lights shone the brightest, and you experienced the incredible grandeur and majesty of your civilization. Everything seemed possible.

But now, you are here—or, to be more precise, you are now, stuck in the current and very dark age. How did you come to be here and now? Perhaps it was an accident. Perhaps you were placed in stasis as punishment for crimes you did or didn't commit, or as part of a magical experiment into the nature of time. Some magical calamity might have flung you forward, hurling you through the long centuries to emerge in a world far removed from the one you remember. However you made the journey, you now inhabit a changed world. The people you knew are bones and dust. The cities you loved so well are now reduced to monster-infested ruins. The life you led is a fading memory that only you recall.

Now you must make a choice. Do you lament the past you lost and curse this unforeseen future, or do you embrace this new, savage world? Or, perhaps, will you try to recapture the light that was lost and restore your old, forgotten realm? Only this time, under your guidance, the empire might stand the test of time.

Creating a Ghost of the Past

The first step in creating a ghost of the past is to determine where and when your character came from. In what era was he born? What nation did she call her own? If you're playing in the D&D® world of Nerath, you might choose one of the legendary empires,

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such as Bael Turath or Arkhosia. If you're playing in a D&D campaign setting, such as the Forgotten Realms, Greyhawk, or Dragonlance settings, you can pick from any of the civilizations that predate the campaign's current time. In the Greyhawk setting, your character might hail from the ancient Suloise Empire, before the Twin Cataclysms that reduced that nation to ashes. In the Dragonlance setting, you might have been a contemporary of Huma—a witness and possibly a participant in the Third Dragon War. And in the Forgotten Realms setting, you might have taken part in the Fall of Netheril, been present for the founding of Cormyr, or walked the streets of Myth Drannor.

If you're playing in a published world or one created by your group, talk to your Dungeon Master about the time from which your character comes, the place he or she called home, and the things he or she should know. When choosing a race, be mindful of the people who lived in the character's civilization. If your character comes from Bael Turath, odds are the character is a human or tiefling. He or she is probably dragonborn if the character came from Arkhosia. Your class choices should also reflect your character's unusual origins.

Regardless of race and class, the virtues and vices of an ancient civilization formed your character's personality. His or her behavior and mindset might seem alien to those living in the present. When selecting feats and powers, you can emphasize your character's nature by making choices that are unusual for the group.

As a final detail, determine how your character learned the Common language. He or she might be the product of an excellent educational system and therefore a quick learner, or the language might be part of the magic that sent the character across time. Alternatively, perhaps everybody speaks the character's language—the Common tongue may be all that remains of his or her empire.

Starting Feature

Because you draw on firsthand experience, your knowledge of the past rivals that of the most learned sages. Moreover, you come from a period in which the humanoid races had either conquered the monstrous creatures or driven them back. You cannot tolerate their current dominance and intend to put them back in their rightful place.

Benefit: You gain training in History. If you are already trained in History, choose a different skill.

Add the language of your fallen empire to the languages you can speak, read, and write.

Finally, you gain the *guidance of the past* power.

Guidance of the Past Ghost of the Past Utility

Your spiritual connection to the past sometimes provides you with unusual and shocking insights.

Encounter
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You make an attack roll, a skill check, or an ability check.
Effect: You roll two d20s for the triggering roll, and use either result. If you roll the same number on both dice, after you complete the action related to the triggering roll, you are dazed until the end of your next turn.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Since adjusting to your changed circumstances, you have spent your time piecing together what happened to your civilization during the gap between now and then. Your discoveries reveal much about the world and its development, allowing you almost perfect recall of historical events.

Benefit: The first time you use your *guidance of the past* power to make a History check during an encounter, you do not expend the power.

Level 10 Feature

Your research into the past reveals the reasons behind the collapse of your society. You take the lesson to heart and focus your efforts on righting the mistakes and errors of the past to create a brighter future. Whenever you make an extra effort, your capabilities seem to increase.

Benefit: Whenever you spend an action point to take an action that requires you to make an attack roll, a skill check, or an ability check, you can use your *guidance of the past power* with the action, even if you have already expended the power.

Optional Powers

Ghosts of the past who cherish the customs of their fallen culture might learn these powers. Besides these options, History skill powers such as *legend lore* and *lessons of history* are particularly appropriate for you.

Level 2 Utility Power

Most of the dangerous creatures that threatened your empire were tamed, chained, or banished in its early days. You grew up hearing impressive tales about the heroes who accomplished these tasks. Perhaps that knowledge will now be useful again.

Mythical Recall Ghost of the Past Utility 2

You recall the successful efforts your people made to tame the world in which they lived.

Encounter
Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: Choose a beast, humanoid, or magical beast that you can see and make a monster knowledge check, using History in place of the skill you would normally use. If the result is 20 or higher, you gain combat advantage against the creature until the end of your next turn.

Level 6 Utility Power

Visions of your past haunt you. You see people you once knew in the faces all around you, feel a sense of déjà vu when you hear of recent events, and experience an eerie feeling when you travel to places that once held import for you. These flashbacks to the life you once led can sometimes help you through a difficult situation, but they can be overwhelming.

Profound Flashback Ghosts of the Past Utility 6

Your mind momentarily drifts through time, back to your old life, and reveals the solution you need.

Daily
Free Action **Personal**

Trigger: You make an attack roll, a skill check, or an ability check, and you dislike the result.

Effect: Reroll three d20s for the triggering roll, and use any result. If you roll the same number on any two dice, after you complete the action related to the triggering roll, you are dazed until the end of your next turn.

Level 10 Utility Power

You do not belong in the present. Your place lies somewhere back in time. You can manipulate the magic holding you in the present and return to the past for a few moments.

Time Jaunt Ghost of the Past Utility 10

The world wavers as you return to your proper time for a moment, which you bring back with you.

Daily
Standard Action **Personal**

Effect: You are removed from play for the next two turns and reappear at the start of the third. When you return, you can spend a healing surge and you gain an action point. You return to play in an unoccupied space within 5 squares of the last space you occupied.

About the Authors

Robert J. Schwalb is a freelance game designer and developer with a slew of works to his name. You can find more of his work in the next incarnation of D&D. You can follow Rob on Twitter (@rjschwalb), become his new best friend on Facebook, or check out his website (www.robertjschwalb.com). When not making fun, Rob spends far too much time listening to music and holding up the bar at his favorite watering hole.

Robert van Wijk has had a great year: He got married, acquired a very spirited daughter, and now has his first *Dragon* publication! When he still had spare time, he loved to put his players' characters into the most impossible situations. Apparently, he was never very good at that—during the past fifteen years, they always found a (marginally) viable solution.

Bazaar of the Bizarre:
It's About Time

By Peter Schaefer

Illustration by Ben Wootten

For as long as magic has existed, those who manipulate magic have tried to muck about with time. Bending it, looping it, finding ways to break it—everyone wants to manipulate this constant of the universe for the sake of their own power. Controlling time is such a draw that nearly every wizard decides to try it at some point. These spellcasters start work just after breakfast, experience a few confusing experiments and near-deadly mishaps, and give up just before breakfast.

Still, every nut has its nutcracker, as someone once said in a timeline that no longer exists. With enough people working on the problem, a few of them are going to wind up creating tools that work.

Kind of.

Though none of the following magic items grants the complete control of time that many wizards dream of, they are still useful tools in certain circumstances. And who better to get into certain circumstances than adventurers?

Boots of Other Paths

The path you take through life is indelible, and many wizards hate that. Think about all those choices that turned out—to be honest—not so great. If only you'd known! These boots are the product of one wizard's attempt to maximize her potential for taking challenging paths. Though the results aren't as she hoped, they still provide a wearer with a useful boon.

Boots of Other Paths Level 13 Uncommon

These fine leather boots lead you down paths you might not normally take.

Feet Slot 17,000 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Minor Action)

Effect: You move up to your speed, ignoring the effects of any terrain you could normally walk over.

Candle of Tomorrow

For some, it is vitally important to see what is to come. For others, it is imperative to avoid all experience of the now. Characters who make use of the *candle of tomorrow* learn that traveling into the future is the easiest form of time magic. When you think about it, you pass into the next moment from the present, after all. With this candle, doing so faster isn't that hard—as long as you have no need to come back.

Candle of Tomorrow Level 15 Uncommon

This silver candle gives off a breathtaking light for the brief instant before it and the creatures around it vanish.

Consumable 25,000 gp

Utility Power ✦ Consumable (Standard Action)

Effect: You light the candle and specify a period of up to 24 hours. Each willing creature within 2 squares of the candle is removed from play until the time you specified elapses. When a creature reappears, it does so in the space from which it vanished or the nearest unoccupied space.

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Dilatory Armor

It's never the right time to take damage, but it's difficult to tell a frenzied attacker bearing down on you to come back later. This enchantment lets you do just that by displacing an injury into the future. Just remember that the bill always comes due.

Dilatory Armor Level 13+ Rare

Defensive gear bearing this enchantment seemingly resists initial signs of attack, until all its wear and tear catches up with it at once.

Lvl 13	+3	17,000 gp	Lvl 23	+5	425,000 gp
Lvl 18	+4	85,000 gp	Lvl 28	+6	2,125,000 gp

Armor: Any
Enhancement Bonus: AC
Utility Power ✦ Encounter (No Action)
Trigger: An attack hits or misses you.
Effect: You delay all effects of the attack on you (save ends). You can choose to fail this saving throw.

Egg of Death

To all appearances a simple eggshell, this item functions by calling forth your corpse from an alternate timeline wherein you died. For whatever reason, fate took a different path in your time, but you can use the corpse to throw off pursuit or call for it in those moments a corpse is needed. You know. Those moments.

Egg of Death Level 11 Uncommon

This apparently empty eggshell feels cold to the touch.

Consumable 500 gp
Utility Power ✦ Consumable (Standard Action)
Effect: You break the egg. Your naked corpse appears in your space or in a space adjacent to you.

Expeditious Tome

Many wizards have suffered from the length of time it takes to perform a ritual. It's disappointing when the simple solution to your conundrum involves your ritual book and ten minutes of work, only to have the villains burst in at minute eight. This is one wizard's solution to the problem: a book that speeds up time for its owner while a ritual is being performed.

Expeditious Tome Level 12+ Uncommon

When you study this tome, time seems to fly.

Lvl 12	+3	13,000 gp	Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp
Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp

Implement: Tome
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical Hit: +1d8 damage per plus
Property
You can inscribe rituals into this tome. When you use the tome to perform a ritual inscribed in it, the time to perform the ritual is halved.

Fugacious Stone

Fugacious stones are the collateral damage of temporal experimentation. As wizards experiment with manipulating time by sending objects into the future and summoning items from the past, that magic spills and spreads. Even those who carefully control arcane energy cannot prevent small amounts of magic from splintering off such time-transformed objects, leaving specks of matter that coalesce to form pebbles unstuck in time. Some theorize that *fugacious stones* aren't actually destroyed when used. Rather, they are flung to a far point in time where they can be found and used again.

Fugacious Stone Level 10 Uncommon

This unassuming pebble appears to momentarily duplicate itself in your hand, or to vanish altogether for a few seconds at a time.

Consumable 200 gp
Utility Power ✦ Consumable (Standard Action)
Effect: You throw the stone at yourself or a willing creature within 10 squares of you. The creature is removed from play until the end of 1d4 of its turns. At that point, the creature reappears in the space from which it vanished or the nearest unoccupied space.

Torc of the Younger Self

Queen Omarosa was a graceful, wise ruler who guided her realm to prosperity during her reign. Her supporters and critics alike lauded her skill at merging the wisdom of age with the passion and idealism of youth to inform her decisions.

Omarosa was never seen without this bronze torc around her neck. To mundane appraisal, it isn't worth much, and she referred to it as a sentimental piece that helped her remain in touch with her youth. After her death, the torc was looted from her tomb. The character who bears it now has a chance to rediscover its true power.

Torc of the Younger Self Level 20+ Rare

This cheap bronze ornament somehow reminds you of the days of your youth.

Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp
Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp			

Neck Slot
Enhancement Bonus: Fortitude, Reflex, and Will
Utility Power (Healing) **✦ Daily** (Standard Action)
Requirement: You must have three or more healing surges remaining.
Effect: You lose three healing surges. You are then restored to your hit point maximum, and any condition affecting you ends.
Utility Power ✦ Daily (No Action)
Effect: You can perform the ritual Speak to the Youth Within.

Weapon of Chronal Omission

Sometimes the best way to deal with foes is to get them out of your sight. With a *weapon of chronal omission* in hand, you'll be better prepared to deal with an enemy when you see it next time.

Weapon of Chronal Omission Level 14+ Rare

This weapon sometimes appears to lag behind where you move it, or to lead your swing by scant inches.

Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp

Weapon: Any melee
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 damage per plus, or recharge the item's utility power

Utility Power ✦ Daily (Free Action)
Trigger: You hit a creature with an attack using this weapon.
Effect: The triggering creature is removed from play (save ends). When the creature saves, it reappears in the space from which it vanished or the nearest unoccupied space.

Artifacts

Many of the items enchanted to muck about with something as important as time evolve to become more than simple tools and weapons. Playing with time in a big way means breaking the most stringent rules of reality, and the creation of artifacts—both minor and major—is often the result.

Rod of Convergence

Each culture has its own legend of how the world will end. Many elves believe that their kind will leave the living realms behind them, and that magic will leave with them. Dwarves cling to the idea of the final forging. Some gnomes believe that reality will wind down like an untensioned spring, while others are sure that the world will explode if they don't improve its design.

Each dragon has its own notions regarding the end of the world, but many of these creatures believe in something they call the convergence. When more than one dragon shares such a complex belief, it's an idea worth paying attention to.

Convergence is the theory that the world ends not in catastrophe but in a broad collapse of all things into one plane—and perhaps into one place. It stems from the many-worlds theory of time: that each choice, decision, or random happenstance occurs in all the ways it can, with each variance splitting off a different world. Most people experience only one such world, but all the others exist. They branch ever outward as infinite different timelines—some barely changed, some vastly different.

Convergence is the belief that this world-tree must collapse one day. Sages of time have all kinds of esoteric reasons for believing it could, but the functional analogy is this. From the seed that was the start of all creation, a tree has grown. We cling to one small twig of one small branch somewhere in this crowded tree. Sometimes we brush against other branches and see what could have been, or against twigs that have grown longer than ours and see what might be, and these moments are called prophecy. This tree has grown tall and branched far, but it cannot bear all its weight forever. It will eventually collapse into a disordered heap of different branches, and everything will jumble together and become as one. This is convergence.

Some say the *Rod of Convergence* is a crack in the world-tree's trunk made manifest. Its powers bring alternate histories and present days closer together, and a version of the rod might exist in every different

SPEAK TO THE YOUTH WITHIN

The Speak to the Youth Within ritual seemingly died with Omarosa, since she kept it a closely guarded secret. Possessing the *torc of the younger self* does not impart knowledge of the ritual. Each time a character uses the torc's utility power, he or she should attempt a DC 34 Arcana check. If successful, the character realizes that the torc has another function but receives no indication of what that function is.

A character can uncover the lost ritual through research into the torc's history. Hired sages can perform the research, or characters can tackle it themselves. Rituals such as Consult Mystic Sages, Consult Oracle, and Loremaster's Bargain are another option. Any route can culminate in a quest to locate Omarosa's tomb and question her using the Speak with Dead ritual.

Speak to the Youth Within

A wispy reflection appears before you, preparing to help you remember knowledge long passed.

Level: 20
Category: Divination
Time: 1 minute
Duration: 5 minutes
Component Cost: 2 healing surges and a focus (*torc of the younger self*)
Market Price: –

When you finish performing the ritual, the spirit of yourself from an earlier time you choose appears before you. It is the person you were at that time, and it approaches you with that perspective. You can converse with the spirit for the duration of the ritual. If you remember the right time in your own past to call on the spirit, you can question yourself when important knowledge is still fresh in your mind.

timeline. A few sages who have studied the rod suggest that it is not merely an artifact of the world-tree, but is a method of propagation. It is moving through world-branches, crossing infinite worlds until it reaches the edge of the world-tree, where it will fall to the formless soil below and sprout a new world-tree. In time, that new tree's branches will entwine with and support those of our own world-tree, preventing the collapse of both through mutual strength.

Rod of Convergence — Epic Level

This relic changes shape when you wield it, from a thumb-thick wooden haft studded with crystals, to a bronze scepter, to a dozen other forms besides.

Artifact: Implement (rod)
Enhancement Bonus: +6 to attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +6d8 damage

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Free Action)
Trigger: You miss with an attack.
Effect: The triggering attack hits instead.

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Free Action)
Trigger: An attack hits you.
Effect: The triggering attack misses instead.

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Free Action)
Trigger: You or a creature you can see makes an ability check, a saving throw, or a skill check, and you dislike the result.
Effect: Change the result to a success or failure.

Utility Power ✦ Daily (Standard Action)
Effect: Choose one creature you can see. You merge that creature with a version of itself from another timeline. Roll on your choice of the Negative Convergence table or the Positive Convergence table.

NEGATIVE CONVERGENCE TABLE

2d4	Effect
2	**Enslaved—The creature is dominated by you (save ends).**
3	**Cursed—The creature gains vulnerable 5 to all damage (save ends).**
4	**Befuddled—The creature takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls, ability checks, and skill checks (save ends).**
5	**Pained—The creature is slowed (save ends).**
6	**Conflicted—The creature is dazed (save ends).**
7	**Exhausted—The creature is weakened (save ends).**
8	**Disintegrated—The creature takes ongoing 15 damage (save ends).** *Aftereffect:* **Ongoing 5 damage (save ends).**

POSITIVE CONVERGENCE TABLE

2d4	Effect
2	**Rested—The creature gains the benefit of a short rest.**
3	**Resistant—The creature gains resist 5 to all damage until the end of 1d4 of its turns.**
4	**Skilled—The creature gains a +2 power bonus to attack rolls, ability checks, and skill checks until the end of 1d4 of its turns.**
5	**Quickened—The creature gains a +2 power bonus to speed until the end of 1d4 of its turns.**
6	**Hardened—The creature gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses and a +5 power bonus to saving throws until the end of 1d4 of its turns.**
7	**Aware—The creature gains truesight 5 until the end of 1d4 of its turns.**
8	**Vivified—The creature gains regeneration 15 until the end of 1d4 of its turns.**

Selfsame Bones

It's unfortunate for the stewards of graveyards and crypts that the residents of those places are so valuable to the practitioners of magic. The creator of the first of the artifacts known as the *selfsame bones* is said to have traveled to her own place of burial after death. Known among those who study time as Mirim, she dug up her own bones and worked magic on them, drawing out the memories of her life and using them as a guide for mapping out the moments to come. In her times of greatest need, Mirim could snap the magic bones she crafted and summon herself to her own aid.

Since then, no others have mastered time travel to the degree necessary to procure their own bones and enchant them. Instead, adventurers continue to find the *Selfsame Bones* and are overcome with the sensation that the bones feel strangely familiar. *Selfsame Bones* do not reveal their working through magical analysis, but rumor and research can reveal their power.

In the absence of mages making these macabre artifacts for themselves, someone else—somewhere and somewhen else—is creating these one-use talismans and leaving them for their owners to find.

Selfsame Bones — Epic Level

The bones of an index finger have been lacquered into a beckoning curl. When you break them, the bones release the magic of your own past.

Artifact: Consumable

Utility Power (Summoning)**✦ Consumable** (Standard Action)
Effect: You summon a duplicate of yourself from an alternative timeline. This duplicate appears in an unoccupied space within range. It is an ally to you and your allies. The duplicate possesses your equipment and has your statistics after you take an extended rest. It has its own actions and takes its turn just after you in the initiative order.

Your duplicate can use any power that you know, expending those powers as normal. It can use the bonuses and properties of your magic items but can't use magic item powers. The duplicate lasts until you dismiss it as a minor action or until the end of the encounter.

If the duplicate drops below 1 hit point or uses a daily power, it disappears and you lose a healing surge (or hit points equal to your surge value if you have no surges left).

CROSS-WORLD SELF

Possessing the *Rod of Convergence* gives a character knowledge of the Cross-World Self ritual. This knowledge fades and is forgotten within minutes of losing possession of the rod. The character remembers once knowing the ritual but cannot perform it even if it was subsequently written down.

Cross-World Self

You search alternative worlds and selves until you find the version of you that has the skills you need.

Level: 22
Category: Binding
Time: 1 hour
Duration: Instantaneous
Component Cost: 15,000 gp, 5 healing surges, and a focus (*Rod of Convergence*)
Market Price: –

When you finish performing the ritual, you merge with an aspect of yourself from another timeline. You can retrain a power, a feat, or a skill selection of your choice, or you can replace a magic item you possess with another item of the same level and rarity.

The DM can choose to alter additional aspects of your character as an unintended consequence of merging with yourself from another timeline. You might discover that you know secrets you didn't know before, or that you remember events that didn't happen. You might possess slightly different equipment or clothing, or even a different hairstyle.

Timekeeper's Mantle

The god Pelor is best known as the bringer of sunlight, comfort, and healing, but time is also his domain. Once in a dozen worldly generations, Pelor finds it necessary to grant a mortal the authority to defend the sanctity of time. During such events, he dispatches his servant Horologe to bestow the boon known as the *Timekeeper's Mantle*.

The one who bears the mantle is addressed by Horologe as "Timekeeper" and receives a number of benefits that aid in the protection of time. The Timekeeper is charged with defending the universe against threats to time from many quarters, including the powerful wizards whose research into controlling time might bring the world close to catastrophe.

Dark, scheming gods also yearn to steal control of time away from Pelor. Tharizdun wishes to sunder time, rending it to chaos and disorder in the course of extinguishing all creation. Vecna seeks to pull time under his purview, knowing that even as time makes creatures forgetful of secrets, it is the ravages of time that lichcraft seeks to conquer.

The creatures that dwell beyond time and space in the Far Realm also wish to corrupt time. Many of them operate outside the bounds of time, and they strongly resent the world for enforcing any form of structured causality on them.

Timekeeper's Mantle Paragon Level

When this radiant blessing is placed upon you, a halo of divine light flares as you control the flow of time itself.

Artifact: Divine Boon

Properties

- ✦ You always know the time of day, as well as when the sun will rise, reach its zenith, and set.
- ✦ You cease to age.
- ✦ On each of your turns, you can take one additional minor action.

Utility Power ✦ Daily (Minor Action)

Effect: Until the end of the encounter, you gain a +2 item bonus to AC, Reflex, and speed.

Utility Power ✦ Daily (Minor Action)

Effect: You can take one additional standard action this turn.

Utility Power ✦ Daily (Free Action)

Trigger: A creature you can see drops below 1 hit point.
Effect: You freeze the triggering creature in time until you release it as a minor action, until Pelor releases it, or until a year and a day have passed. While frozen in time, the creature remains in its location and cannot be moved. It experiences nothing, can take no actions, and cannot benefit or suffer from any effect or condition. When released, the creature returns to the state in which it was frozen in time (typically dead or unconscious).

About the Author

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Character Themes: River Rat

By Jeff Morgenroth

Illustration by Jason Juta

The world's twisting waterways create a pathway for trade between realms, with rivers and shorelines connecting goods to eager merchants in many cities. Wealth trickles up, not down, among the merchant-barons who own the wharfs. As gold moves from gilded hand to gilded hand, the low-born of harbor districts are fated to lives of poverty or crime. Those who dare to strive against the dockside thugs, robbers, and killers find their daily life a game of cat and mouse. But the crafty ones ensure that this is one game the mouse always wins.

Such are the river rats, underworld survivors who thrive at the risks, excess, and thrills of a life that follows the world's waterways. Be it reveling in a quayside tavern or prowling among the reeds, a river rat exemplifies someone who rises in the face of threats rather than shrinks from them. When danger appears, the river rat smiles, cracks his or her knuckles, and asks, "Are you talking to me?"

More Than Scoundrels

Crime is an inescapable reality of life around a city's wharves and is the primary element for the origins and motivations of many river rats. The lowest river

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rats are little more than dockside gangsters or river pirates that prey on merchants, travelers, and other criminals. The most infamous of these are the self-titled "River Rats" of Fallcrest. These scoundrels embrace the river rat identity mostly to disguise their thuggish actions with colorful flair. Anyone can be a criminal, but it takes panache and tenacity to be a real river rat.

The label "river rat" has its origins as an insult slung at halfling river-nomads whose flotillas plied their gusto for life and hijinks into the cities of other races. Some of the dockworkers of these cities disliked the shifty halfling migrants, but their insults didn't have the intended result. Instead, the halflings viewed "river rat" as a compliment. After all, it's what bigger folk called the bravest, toughest, and smartest halflings. The term stuck, and it eventually came to mean any person who falls into the category of dockside ne'er-do-well.

River rats share a zest for life that marks them as something more than mere scoundrels, although they are likely to be viewed as such by the targets of their morally gray pastimes. Most river rats embrace a nomadic lifestyle, traveling the rivers or coastlines that connect civilization so they can experience all that city life has to offer. As such, they become worldlier and more adaptive than their sedentary peers.

While ever on the move, a river rat is never one to scurry away. A stubborn grandiosity belies the river rat's low-born appearance, surprising rival thugs or curious guards. Not all river rats are criminals, but all of them are used to crime. What makes a river rat different is swaggering bravado and bottomless tenacity.

River rats that live for unscrupulous thrills might use their talents to become grifters. They use a perplexing flurry of slang assembled from languages picked up during their travels to disguise their bamboozling. The best river rats can make this slang utterly confusing or completely reassuring. A crafty river rat lets the listener comprehend some of what is said but covers the details with slang, letting the listener fill in the gaps.

Other river rats confidently view themselves as the toughest individuals on the dockside. They aren't afraid to pick a fight, and they use slang as a tool for confusing opponents.

Regardless of their profession, river rats embody foremost a love of the world's changing currents. Whether they move from city to city with nomadic restlessness or master an urban maze along the pier, they are a versatile and diverse lot. The most daring river rats take up the mantle of adventurer, savoring the thrill that comes with performing bold feats. Some of them go on to greatness, becoming masters of the underworld or rakish folk heroes whose deeds continue to inspire.

RIVER RAT SLANG

Use the following list of river rat slang to help you talk the talk. Many of these words might be expressed as adjectives, nouns, or verbs, which only serves to confuse listeners even more.

Buckled. Drunk, or incapable of rational thought.
Cheek. To show disrespect.
Clink. Coinage, wealth.
Clugs. To be at the end or lowest quality of something.
Croaker. A town guard.
Crocodile. Someone who lies.
Crow-eater. A person from an unfriendly town.
Crumb-crushers. Teeth.
Flick. To sell at a profit.
Flog. To sell at a loss.
Frisk the whiskers. What a river rat does to prepare before doing something important.
Goonie. A dark cloak, as for sneaking about.
Gut-bucket. To surrender or to be pathetic.
Hobnail. To punch or engage in fisticuffs.
Hogging. Something going especially well.
Hoon. A loudmouthed or hostile person.
Mud-duck. A small raft or skiff.
Mugging. To laugh.
Nod. To acknowledge or understand.
Pie-faced. Feeling very happy.
Puckled. To be fatigued or short of breath.
Quack. To talk annoyingly.
Quirked. Tricked or bamboozled.
Ratter. A friendly term for a fellow river rat.
Scuttered. Hurt or heavily damaged.
Spindle-shanks. A tall or awkward person.
Stonkered. Beaten, cornered, or perplexed.
Tall reeds. Successful or wealthy people.
Tickler. A short, halfling-sized knife.
Yabby. A delicious freshwater shrimp.

Shaping Identity

Because nautical shipping is the fastest nonmagical method of travel in the D&D world, river lanes and coastlines are critical to the survival of population centers. As such, criminal elements are always drawn to the quays and harbors to exploit trade. Your river rat might naturally be pulled into the unscrupulous lifestyle of a city's corrupt underworld, especially into the gangs that run ports or shipping harbors. These gangs might be guilds with connections to political rulers, or two-bit thugs who rough up traders just stepping off the docks. Merchants despise such criminals because of the cost of their actions.

How your river rat interacts with these hoodlums is a decision that can enrich your character's identity. You might decide that your time with a gang is

CHARACTER THEMES

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about your character, theme adds a third component to help refine your story and identity. The river rat theme can encompass several unique stories for characters within the same concept. For example, if you're a rogue who chooses the river rat theme, you might be a snarky smuggler, using your knowledge of waterways to move the choicest of treasure, while a fighter river rat might be a brawny adventurer more interested in a good scrapping than in loot.

For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore," the first article in this series, from *Dragon* 399.

something in your character's past, creating the foundation for your background, or you might be an active member in a gang, balancing your criminal duties with your adventures. Then again, you might be a heroic scalawag who protects and helps others who ply the rivers.

Consider the role you played in your past and how it shapes your character's identity now. Additionally, developing some previous exploits, safe houses, accomplices, and rivals can give your river rat character a firm start for personal adventures.

Burglar. A river rat burglar uses confusing talk to steal in plain sight or roguish skills to infiltrate secured places. Many burglars steal for personal gain, but others do so to feed the hungry and supply the needy. A few do both. For you, is the excitement of thievery more important than the profit, or do you steal in the name of some higher cause like a hero out of a halfling tall-tale?

Fence. A river rat fence, often working with thieves and smugglers, buys and sells illicit goods in the city. These river rats are usually the craftiest of the bunch, using numerous contacts gained during their travels to acquire and unload merchandise. How do you go about negotiating payment for fenced stock? Do you use your slang to trick buyers, or do you save that for outwitting rivals?

Grifter. A master of words and con jobs, a river rat grifter is all about charisma. These river rats misdirect authorities and rivals, getting the job done with fast talk and legerdemain. They also serve as eyes and ears on the street, looking for opportunities and warning signs. Do you run confidence games and cheat at gambling? When you pull a con, who benefits?

Smuggler. The smuggler moves stolen, prohibited, or taxable goods in and out of a city. This is the kind of work that river rats love. Smuggling is risky and often involves outsmarting authorities. Smuggler river rats find their slang-filled bluffs put to the test, especially if the smuggling is for a good cause or in opposition to tyrannical laws. Do you smuggle goods using a variety of rat holes scattered across the harbor district, or do you man your own shallow-bottomed boat past river patrols?

Enforcer. Thugs who rough up competition, intimidate merchants, and get their hands bloody, enforcers are soldiers among river rats. Some river rats go for the violent life, turning their slang into creative insults or threats while getting up close and personal with rivals. Criminal river rats use their combat prowess for personal gain, while heroic river rats stand up for others. Where do you draw the line as an enforcer? Who deserves to benefit from your toughness and skill?

Creating a River Rat

Any class might be drawn to the river rat lifestyle, but those well suited to rough encounters using words and steel live the longest. The typical river rat is a rogue, using the class's diverse skill set and precise martial prowess to outshine the competition. Classes with the defender role, especially the fighter, make exceptional river rats as well. These classes give the character the grit to reflect the river rat's unique tenacity and eagerness to throw down with opponents. River rats who spend the majority of their time on the fringes of civilization might be better suited as rangers, being masters of the rivers that crisscross the world. Few arcane or divine classes are suited to the gritty circumstances of the river rat's life, although druids who are attuned to the spirits of a city's alleys and streets could make for an unconventional river rat. In fact, a druid could make the river rat title literal through the use of the *skittering sneak* power. Halflings and gnomes make ideal river rats, their pint-sized stature belying a larger-than-life persona. Regardless of class, river rats have skills or personalities that make them comfortable in urban environments.

Starting Feature

Most river rats grow up amid a constantly changing backdrop, traveling up and down waterways or in the bustling dock districts of cities. As such, they are quick to pick up the skills it takes to keep safe. A river rat possesses a catalogue of who's who and what's what in a given city. Moreover, a river rat is toughest when his or her back is against the wall.

Benefit: You gain a +1 power bonus to Streetwise checks and Bluff checks. You also gain the *river rat's gambit* attack power.

River Rat's Gambit River Rat Attack

You retaliate ferociously when wounded, risking your own skin in the process.

Encounter
Standard Action
Requirement: You must be bloodied.
Target: One creature
Effect: You use an at-will attack power against the target. If you hit, you deal the target 2d6 extra damage. If you miss, you take 1d6 damage.
Level 11: 3d6 extra damage; 2d6 damage if you miss.
Level 21: 4d6 extra damage; 3d6 damage if you miss.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

If there's one thing a river rat loves, it's an opponent flexing its muscles, which isn't so much a threat as an invitation. The river rat is glad to respond to his opponent's display with one of his or her own, which usually involves a briefly raised eyebrow, a painful low blow to the vitals, and a snarky insult. Do you take these challenges with a puffed chest and an open invitation to "try it one more time," or do you feign weakness for a split second before showing your opponent how much you enjoy this kind of stuff?

Benefit: Your power bonus to Streetwise checks and Bluff checks increases to +2. In addition, when you use *river rat's gambit*, if you miss with the attack, the power is not expended.

Level 10 Feature

River rats are happily acknowledged as the toughest, scrappiest, and longest-surviving of all scoundrels. Like a rat that somehow escapes every trap, you have proven that you can get out of dire situations time and again.

Benefit: When you grant combat advantage to enemies, they do not gain the bonus to attack rolls against you.

Optional Powers

Much of a river rat's success comes from a zesty attitude toward life. Sometimes playful, sometimes ornery, this boisterous persona almost always garners attention—including from the river rat's enemies. Most will delight in hobnailing cheeky hoons from time to time, but when the going gets really tough, a true river rat proves an unexpectedly tenacious and dangerous adversary.

Level 2 Utility Power

Like most low-born ghetto dwellers, river rats can easily go unnoticed, but this is rarely their first inclination when in danger. They're feisty, preferring to dig in and grit their crumb-crushers rather than scamper away—especially when they have allies.

River Rat Tactics River Rat Utility 2

When it counts, you know how to take advantage of any opening you find.

Daily ✦ Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You assume the river rat tactics stance. Until the stance ends, you have combat advantage against any enemy that is adjacent to one or more of your allies.

Level 6 Utility Power

Although you might use your slang to swindle gullible townsfolk, you can also use it to confuse an adversary in a fight, making the foe second-guess your intent. Gestures and body language are also part of your communication. Using misleading hand signs, falsely placing your body weight, or flicking your eyes from side to side can confuse opponents who don't understand or even use language.

River Rat Quack River Rat Utility 6

Because of your shifting body language and fast talk, your foe has difficulty reacting to your actions.

Encounter
Minor Action **Close** burst 5
Target: One creature that can see and hear you in the burst
Effect: Make a Bluff check to gain combat advantage against the target. If you succeed, you also provoke no opportunity attacks from the target until the end of your next turn.

Level 10 Utility Power

The toughest river rats gain reserves of strength through their defiance. Unafraid of going toe to toe with larger foes, a wounded river rat relents only when the opponent is face down at the river's edge.

River Rat Cheek River Rat Utility 10

When the odds look bleak, you smile and double down on your trash talk.

Daily
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You are bloodied by an attack.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, you gain a +1 power bonus to all defenses and a +1 power bonus to saving throws. Whenever an attack misses you or you succeed on a saving throw, you gain temporary hit points equal to 3 + your Charisma modifier.

About the Author

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The Harpers of Waterdeep

By Erin M. Evans

Illustrations by Ralph Horsley and Matias Tapia

"To be a Harper is to sacrifice a part of yourself for the greater good—to be the pebble in the charger's path, the knife that frays the hangman's rope, the barking dog that draws the hunter's eye. We do not act for glory, but for the good of all."

Those who claim the title of Harper come from many walks of life and aid the organization in a thousand different ways. In some aspects, the Harpers of Waterdeep are no different than Harpers have always been. Like the legendary Harpers of Shadowdale, they are cautious actors, planning every move. Like the long lost Harpers of Berdusk, they do not shy away from danger and they maintain a firm organization. But like no one else, the Harpers of Waterdeep bring the skills of infiltrators, spies, and assassins to the side of what's right.

History

Over the centuries, the fate of Faerûn has more than once fallen into the hands of the semi-secret organization known as the Harpers. The group's history is shrouded in myth and legend—lore insists that it was founded alongside Myth Drannor, the ancient elven city. The Harpers' strength has purportedly waxed and waned throughout its existence—at times enough to battle the gods themselves, at other times, hardly enough to keep its members united. When the Era of Upheaval began, prior to the Spellplague, the Harpers' numbers were at their highest. Harper agents roamed throughout Faerûn and even beyond, maintaining a balance of power that kept the wilds and the cities safe, the sacred places protected, and tyranny at bay.

But the Spellplague and the ensuing "Wailing Years" left the Harpers decimated. Many died, and others vanished entirely. Those who survived were cut off from one another, so they focused solely on the perils that menaced their homes and neighbors. The cell known as the Harpers of Luruar was all that remained of the Harpers living in the North, near Everlund's Moongleam Tower. Once the Harpers would have kept a close watch on all the evils and powers that threatened the fragile stability of the North—such as Many-Arrows's fractious peace, Luskan's chaos, and Neverwinter's repeated catastrophes. But the Harpers of Luruar no longer had the resources to focus on any issue except the most direct threat—Returned Netheril, the city of Shade.

Netheril's reach grew as the ancient city sought to become an empire once more, and the Harpers of Luruar became less the meddlers and watchers that the folk of Faerûn had thought them to be, and more an actual insurgency. By 1475 DR, the Harpers of Luruar had managed, by a thousand cuts, to bleed a little strength from Shade without being caught. Some argue that without the efforts of such Harpers,

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Netheril would have overtaken the High Forest and areas beyond long ago.

As time went on and the situation improved, more prospective agents found their ways to Moongleam Tower, hoping to sign up—particularly career spies from other private groups that had lost their patrons and their contacts. While not everyone was suited to the Harper cause, the organization's once pitiful ranks began to swell again, and the reach of the Harpers grew.

But these new Harpers brought with them enemies of their own. Who could focus solely on Shade when the Abolethic Sovereignty seeped from the Far Realm, when Thay gained more undead every day, and when the Warlock Knights of Vaasa crushed their peasantry underfoot? The organization was growing too fast in scope—and that divided focus allowed corruption to set in.

The first identified traitor was Waterdeep's own spymaster—a man called Aron Vishter. Vishter—or "the Fisher" as he had long been called—was taking coin from the Zhentarim to send Harper agents on missions that would benefit those old enemies. Worse still, he was consigning other agents to death to keep the Harpers out of certain areas. One of his own agents named Tam Zawad (called "The Shepherd"), a colleague from his days before the Harpers, finally caught Vishter and brought him to justice. The High Harpers of Everlund elevated Zawad to Vishter's position and tasked him with rooting out the extent of his former superior's treachery by any means possible. Thus, although Everlund remains the heart of the Harpers organization, in many ways their seat of power has shifted to the City of Splendors.

The Book of Tarchamus

The Book of Tarchamus is a powerful magic artifact—a tome imbued with the consciousness and memory of an ancient Netherese arcanist. It has the ability to absorb knowledge from all who touch it, producing scrolls and smaller books containing said information almost instantaneously on a nearby shelf. The book is kept hidden within a Harper safe house in Waterdeep. Though the Harpers who know of its existence agree that its use is a last resort, the process of turning knowledge to writing is painless. It's the book they're worried about—the artifact is undeniably wicked and yearns to learn more of the new and changing world for its own benefit. More than one neophyte Harper caught lingering too long over its changing pages has been summarily sent away, far from the book's reach.

Harpers across Faerûn

The Harpers of Waterdeep are not the only group using the Harper name. In many other locations, Harpers operate with no connection to the Shepherd and his flock.

While the Spellplague sundered the original organization into concerned folk scattered across the continent, the hope of returning the Harpers to their former glory has never died.

Many feel that the Harpers who have returned to Cormyr and the Dales are the spiritual successors of the Harpers of old, but their methods do not sit well with Tam Zawad. He feels that Storm Silverhand's open recruitment puts too many innocents into danger. Too many recruits believe in the Code of the Harpers but lack the training for spycraft. Tam has discouraged his agents from using Storm's network connections, but in times of trouble, many have chosen to ignore this request. They know full well that should anything go wrong, they not only will have an earful from Tam Zawad, but they will also have to make amends to the fallen Harper's survivors. If Storm Silverhand has any opinion at all about Tam Zawad, she hasn't articulated it.

More information on other cells of Harpers can be found in Ed Greenwood's "Eye on the Realms: Whispered Words," in *Dungeon* 188.

The Harpers of Waterdeep Today

While the taint of corruption still lingers over the Harpers of Waterdeep, the execution of the Fisher and his web of traitors, coupled with a strong recruiting effort, has revitalized the organization. By 1486 DR, the Harpers of Waterdeep possess a network of agents whose reach hearkens back to that of the Harpers of old. But unlike the Harpers of yesteryear and those based elsewhere, the organization here cannot count Chosen among its ranks. As the world descends into chaos with the advent of the Sundering, the Harpers of Waterdeep must rely on a stricter organization than they once used to keep information flowing and agents coming home.

The Harpers here have reorganized along their old lines. A coterie of High Harpers leads the group, meeting infrequently, but regularly communicating by using secret messages both magical and mundane. Several spymasters work with the High Harpers, taking charge of agents and directing regional efforts. When spymasters or High Harpers are unavailable, a handler typically aids the agents in their work. Handlers might be agents, or informers temporarily elevated to a new status, or injured or even "retired" Harpers dragooned back into service. In addition to the agents who actually carry out missions, the Harpers take advantage of a network of sympathetic folk who provide information, supplies, or bolt-holes to hide in for a night.

USING THE HARPERS OF WATERDEEP

The Harpers of Waterdeep are involved in many plots and missions—almost more than they can handle. Any threat to the safety and balance of Faerûn could lead characters to interact with these agents—or not.

In particular, the Harpers of Waterdeep are strongly concerned with Netheril's growing influence in the Heartlands. Many believe this increased presence presages an outright war with the Twelve Princes, and they are doing what they can to forestall it, while preparing those who lie in Shade's path for the coming conflict.

High Harpers

At the peak of the organization is the council known as the High Harpers. While not individually as powerful as the High Harpers of yore, each has earned his or her place through long and notable years of loyal service to the Harpers' cause. The High Harpers direct the larger organization, keeping an eye on how small efforts and evils affect the bigger picture.

Particularly because of the Fisher's treachery, the High Harpers take the Code of the Harpers quite seriously—they believe completely in the Harpers' goals, even if they don't all agree on how best to attain them. The High Harpers are few, and the exact number changes as new members are installed by council vote, and sitting High Harpers die or retire.

High Harper Tam "the Shepherd" Zawad

The spymaster of Waterdeep is now a High Harper in his own right, but Tam Zawad only reluctantly came in from the field. A Calishite man in his early fifties, Zawad hasn't lost his edge, and his underlings occasionally have to remind him to delegate. The devout priest of Selûne became a spy when a spymaster of Amn caught him assassinating a Shadovar agent and brought him into her network. After her death, he served many masters, but Selûne above all.

Though he wields a great deal of influence, Tam Zawad doesn't desire power—he takes the Code of the Harpers seriously. Because of his old cryptonym, some Harpers from other networks call the Waterdhavian Harpers "the Flock," to the erstwhile "Shepherd's" consternation.

Tam Zawad always has an eye and an ear out for potential new Harpers—particularly individuals who have successfully fought against Shade. Normally, Harper agents study and test potential members before any offer of membership is made—in fact, before the candidates even know they are under consideration. But sometimes, when time and resources are short, Tam Zawad may pull an adventurer into the fold much more quickly.

Moongleam Tower

In the walled city of Everlund, Moongleam Tower has remained a strong base of Harper operations throughout the centuries. Four narrow, black stone towers joined together, crowned by an open turret and signaling mirror, Moongleam Tower is visible from almost anywhere in the city. Around the base of the tower is a dry moat. A wall, added after the Wailing Years, surrounds an open yard. Harpers are free to rest here in one of the few guest rooms, though those from other Harper networks may be under scrutiny throughout their stay.

Spymasters

Spymasters direct the actions of their agents in broad strokes, attempting to maximize the return from the investment of agents' time and effort. The spymaster's main role is to keep track of the agents in the field and report back to the High Harpers, but as the Era of Upheaval reaches its climax, old skills in the field are becoming a spymaster's greatest asset. The High Harpers appoint spymasters, frequently taking into account the previous spymaster's wishes.

Khochen of Westgate

Khochen, the enigmatic spymaster of Westgate, is difficult to pin down. In fact, a search for the Tuigan thief is likely to send the petitioner through a chain of rogues and shadowy contacts, only to discover that Khochen was one of the first links. Khochen and her agents believe that keeping the field crowded with local power groups is the best way to keep them all in check. As a result of implementing this philosophy in Waterdeep, Khochen has many surprising allies at her back. Her fellow spymasters are less trusting however—many of them do not believe that the Westgate spymaster has drifted far enough from her thieving roots. Khochen's true weakness is neither jewels nor coin, however, but gossip. Inquirers with juicy rumors to offer may find it much easier to locate Khochen than others do.

Though Khochen's primary focus is always keeping the rival gangs of Westgate in balance, lately she has become concerned about a few other issues as well. Khochen has noticed recently that a disturbing number of high-quality gems have been turning up in the hands of Westgate's fences. In addition, Vaasan ships have been arriving in the harbor with little cargo to unload, and Sembians are skulking around the city's taverns.

Lord Vescaras Ammakyl

The youngest son of a venerable Waterdhavian noble house, Vescaras has an impressive network of agents. His drovers, wagonmasters, and merchants ply the trade routes spanning the entire western half of Faerûn, carrying out his instructions as they travel. Relying on his family's extensive wine trade, Vescaras keeps meticulous track of his far-flung agents and is ready to jump on any possible threat to the trade routes' tenuous safety. His fellow spymasters find the Turmian half-elf frustratingly cautious—and nearly as often, frustratingly correct. When not traveling, Vescaras stays in his family's estate in the Sea Ward, spending much of his time with the family vintners.

Of late, two mysteries have been occupying Vescaras's attention. One is that several informants and Harper agents have gone missing along the trade roads. The other is four separate incidents of slaves fleeing Westgate and claiming to be from far-off Damara. Vescaras plans to ride for Westgate with the next caravan his family sends out.

Handlers

In certain cases, a spymaster's expertise isn't warranted. A single agent can adequately cover some locations; others are too dangerous for the agent to make regular contact from. A select few locations benefit from an agent who collects information from untrained informants instead of Harper agents. In such cases, agents may report to a handler, who acts as a go-between, connecting the agents on the ground with the High Harpers or spymasters. A handler doesn't usually direct other agents as a spymaster does, but in an emergency is capable of doing so. Almost all handlers can use sendings and similar rituals to keep better track of their informers.

Dahl Peredur

Once a bright and promising field agent, Dahl Peredur experienced several unfortunate incidents, culminating in a failed mission in which his main informant died and his target fled to Shade. After this mission, Dahl was pulled into the House and made a handler while he recovered.

Tam prizes the Dalesman's skill at mining reports for information, but Dahl's short temper and guilt about the circumstances that led to his changed position have made him unpleasant to deal with. Dahl receives reports directly from the Zhentarim double agents, the Cormyrean agents, and a variety of other handlers. In addition, he often serves as Tam Zawad's scribe.

Though Dahl is not active in the field, he's always looking for information about ancient Netherese artifacts—particularly those from the same library that held the Book of Tarchamus. Most scholars doubt that many additional works survived, but Dahl is convinced that more exist, and that such texts may provide the key to finding out what Shade will do next.

Agents

The bulk of the Harper organization consists of field personnel known as agents (or sometimes scouts). Agents are the Harpers that characters are most likely to run into—whether they realize it or not. An agent is free to pursue any perceived threat and gather any information desired, but the organization thrives on reliable reporting of mission information.

The Waterdhavian Harpers recruit the best of the best—but most of all, they seek people who truly believe in the need for balance in the world. Apprentice Harpers are often referred to as fledglings, and they must be mentored for a time before they are released into the field.

Mira Zawad

A trained historian, Mira is the only daughter of Tam Zawad. Although she knows that fact smoothed the path for her acceptance into the organization, she is also fully aware that her father takes his ideals seriously, and he would treat any sloppiness or deceit on her part the same as he would from any other agent.

Some time ago, Mira became a fringe member of a Banite Zhentarim cell for the purpose of gaining access to ancient Netherese sites, but she has since secretly joined the Harpers' cause. A few within the Zhentarim know her true identity, but Mira has been careful to let those individuals believe that she is funneling Harper information to them. Although the Zhentarim prize her contacts with the tribes of the Bedine—the better to slip caravans through the wilds of Anauroch—Mira knows her days as a double agent are numbered. Whether she flees to the Harpers or into the desert remains to be seen.

At present, the Zhentarim with whom Mira allies are distracted by their organizations' current shakeups—a fortunate situation for Mira, who is sure that she's found the remains of an ancient Low Netherese city north of the Black Road. She's looking for assistance—guards for her expedition, someone to distract Shade's attention, or even fellow historians—and she's willing to pay.

Ebros Windsong

Only recently made a full agent, Ebros is currently serving a secondary apprenticeship of sorts to the demanding spymaster of the High Forest and Luruar, the wood elf ranger Daranna Brokenspear. Although Ebros's talent with a bow is admirable, his skills in woodcraft leave much to be desired. Despite these shortcomings, the half-elf is eager to prove himself to Daranna, and he does not flinch when other Harpers mistake him for Daranna's fledgling.

Recently, Ebros has begun to suspect that one of the High Forest elves from whom Daranna gets

intelligence is secretly a member of the Eldreth Veluuthra, a violent group of elf supremacists who seek to exterminate humans. But when he mentioned this suspicion to Daranna, she ignored him. Something else is definitely going on.

Lady Tennora Hedare

The niece of the current Lord Hedare, Tennora is an attentive and mannerly noblewoman who was brought into the Harpers by Vescaras Ammakyl. Although she is a lady of Waterdeep, she has also trained as a wizard—and less formally as a thief. More recently, she has studied with Nazra Mrays, a prominent merchant and secret Masked Lord of Waterdeep. This contact results in Tennora frequently carrying messages from the Harpers to the Masked Lords—although whether the messages reach anyone except Nazra Mrays is not clear to Tam Zawad. Tennora is seldom seen outside the Harper halls without one of her bodyguards—a fierce Tethyrian woman and a soft-spoken half-orc.

Tennora faces an unenviable task—keeping communications open between two groups who value their secrecy. In particular, because Open Lord Neverember's campaign in Neverwinter conflicts with the Harpers concerns that the city is too overrun with threats to save, Tennora is looking for ways to achieve both groups' goals. Adventurers coming from Neverwinter might have information she could use.

Street-Eyes, Bases, and Support

Agents of the Harpers can take the fight only so far without aid. Safe houses need running, villains need watching, and agents need healing, care, and coin. Plenty of people within the organization aren't field agents, but the Harpers would collapse without them.

The Harper Hall and Nera Harldrake

The Waterdhavian base of the Harpers is hidden within a pubic inn and tavern called The Beholder's Lament, which is located in the Trade Ward of Waterdeep. It is neither the nicest inn (those who want someplace pleasant to stay can choose from plenty of better inns close by) nor the shabbiest (those who want a cheap, dirty place where no one will bother them wouldn't stay here). Forbiddances that prevent enemies of the Harpers from successfully spying protect many of its rooms.

To all who enter the Harper's secretive refuge in Waterdeep, Nera is nothing but a gruff tavernmistress—the sort adventurers can find in any town across Faerûn. In truth, Nera was once a spy in the service of the Open Lord, until she took an arrow to the knee. Now her keen eye and memory for faces serves Tam Zawad well, because she stands as the gatekeeper for the hidden rooms that make up the Harper safe house. This inn has been the Harpers' secret hideout for nearly a decade, but recently the High Harpers have been debating relocating it.

Nera's past is far behind her, but of late she's found unusual symbols carved into the fence around her tavern—and they're not the Harpers' symbols. She can't recall seeing any of them before, but the possibility that one of the Open Lord's old enemies has found her is one she's particularly concerned about.

Bargewright Inn and Feston Bargewright

Goodman Feston Bargewright is the current owner of his family's storied, eponymous tavern just a few days north of Waterdeep. In addition to running the inn, Feston serves as guardian for the portal that lies hidden in the cave under the building's foundation. Any agent needing to use the portals can show his tattoo to Feston and, after a brief, coded exchange, get the key to the room that leads to the portal—as well as information about the portal's general behavior of late. Named after his ancestor who first fortified the inn, Feston enjoys the excitement of carrying on this secret connection, but he is fearful of the portal, convinced that it will malfunction one day and devour an agent. The portal currently connects the Bargewright Inn with several locations—including Noanar's Hold at the edge of the High Forest and Everlund.

Feston has good reason to be worried. The elderly woman who guards the portal is actually a tiefling descended from night hags, and neither Feston nor the previous portalkeeper have any idea that she might have connections to the Abyss and beyond.

Thort's Findings and Undevvur Thort

This curiosity shop in the North Ward of Waterdeep resides in the head of what was once one of the famed

Walking Statues. The owner, Undevvur Thort, is a wizened old ex-adventurer who leans on a cane that some locals insist is "more than a cane." He lives in the shop, a many-leveled place of tight staircases and landings ascending the hollow interior of the head. The shop is crammed with oddments sold to Undevvur by adventurers, mostly "relics" brought back from Undermountain and other delves. Undevvur is known for his exotic goods and odd sense of humor, but few realize that the old man is a Harper ally or that his shop boasts several hidden rooms that serve as safe houses for agents and their contacts.

Thort is always interested in new and strange artifacts—especially if the seller has a tale to tell about them. In exchange, he might unlock some of his treasures for fellow adventurers to admire.

Becoming a Harper

You do not come to the Harpers of Waterdeep seeking recruitment—they come to you. The Harpers of Waterdeep want agents who can be trusted deep within enemy territory. Agents who can appear to "belong" among the Shadovar, in Sembia, Many-Arrows, or Thay are in high demand. People trained at infiltration and intelligence gathering make excellent candidates, even if that training came from an unsavory past. If an agent is willing to swear to the Code, many sins can be forgiven in the pursuit of a more stable Faerûn. Bards and rangers made up the majority of Harpers in years past, but the Waterdhavian Harpers now have a more thorough mix of agent professions, since the organization is currently seeking to stem the powers of Netheril and beyond.

The Code of the Harpers

First and foremost, a Harper must work to maintain peace and balance in the world. This focus is as important in Waterdeep as it is in Shadowdale, or Berdusk, or even Kara-Tur. Wickedness and evil must be stopped, but so must people who seek to gain power over others by traditionally "good" methods. Moreover, a Harper must always consider the ramifications of his or her actions—thwarting disaster helps no one if it merely opens the path for greater disasters. To this end, the Harpers strongly encourage preserving and remembering the past—such information may save innocent folk one day.

A Harper does what needs to be done. The organization does not restrict the individual agent's personal freedom, with a few exceptions. Any Harper who seeks personal power over others or who betrays or subverts the cause of the Harpers is stripped of rank and, in most cases, is executed as a traitor once proof of the crime is obtained. Particularly in the wake of the Fisher's betrayal and efforts by the Shadovar and the Zhentarim to influence the Harpers, the organization makes this last part of the Code clear to all who wish to embrace the calling. Waterdhavian Harpers also respect the agents to whom they report—the spymasters and High Harpers all earned their authority—but they never quail from pointing out corruption, regardless of the source.

THE PIN IS MIGHTIER?

In the years since the Spellplague, the myth of the Harpers has grown beyond control. Chapbooks featuring famous Harpers of old are readily available for purchase on Waterdeep's streets, and owning a facsimile Harper pin is a common affectation among adventurous nobles. Fearing for the safety of such innocents, as well as his own agents, Tam Zawad has sought to discourage the wearing of Harper pins, pointing out that they're easily found and stolen in the event that an agent is captured.

Instead, the Waterdhavian Harpers have begun marking themselves with magical tattoos of the Harper symbol. These tattoos can be hidden or revealed with a phrase known only to the wearer, and these marks make it safer for Harpers to identify themselves to one another in dangerous situations.

A few among the Harpers have flouted this edict, preferring the tradition of the pins and believing themselves capable of keeping the secret. But as the wars preceding the Sundering expand, more and more agents are opting for the tattoos, especially when they intend to venture behind enemy lines.

The tattoo is applied to a designated area of the body (agent's choice, but it must be easy to reach). The process takes about an hour and must be performed by one of the skinscriveners who work for the Harpers. The agent chooses the trigger word at this point, which is revealed to no one—not even Tam Zawad. The tattoo heals within a few days, but the spell causes it to tingle and itch for a tenday, during which time most agents lie low.

In addition to the pin or tattoo, each Waterdhavian Harper carries a small kit containing a modified ritual scroll and components, so that even on the other side of the continent, he or she is never completely cut off from support. Some agents choose to carry spares of this kit, but disguising its true purpose is extremely difficult should it be discovered.

About the Author

Erin M. Evans is the author of several Forgotten Realms novels, including *The Adversary*, the third book in the Sundering series. Erin graduated from Washington University in St. Louis with a degree in Anthropology—a course of study aimed at fieldwork, though it also works well for fleshing out fantasy cultures, which gets fewer botflies in her socks. Find her on Facebook, Twitter, and at slushlush.com.

Ecology of the Kruthik

By Tim Eagon

Illustrations by William O'Connor and David Griffith

"As I had feared, our clan's newest mining outpost, one of our proudest achievements, was completely destroyed. Kruthik tunnels riddled the deserted complex, and I knew it was pointless to search for survivors."

–Theros Silveraxe, Dwarf Darkstrider

Kruthiks are reptilian monsters that are literally an infernal hybrid of insect and drake. Long ago, the tiefling empire of Bael Turath used vile magic to create the first kruthiks for use as living siege weapons. Their experiment was only a partial success, though, because these ill-tempered beasts proved nearly impossible to control and quickly escaped into the Underdark during Bael Turath's fall. There kruthiks thrived, and today these rapacious predators are one of the greatest threats facing the subterranean civilizations of the Underdark as well as their neighbors on the surface.

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Infernal Origin

Flush from their success creating felldrakes, the Turathi beastmasters focused their attention on a loftier goal. At their emperor's behest, they sought to breed monstrosities that could breach enemies' defenses and attack from within. As they had many times in the past, the beastmasters beseeched the archdevil Alloces, the Butcher of Nessus and Father of Monsters (*Dragon* 373), for aid. Using Alloces's unholy gifts, the beastmasters infused the essence of a hellish burrowing insect from the Nine Hells into scytheclaw drakes, creating the first kruthiks.

Unfortunately for the beastmasters, the tieflings couldn't domesticate the mutant drakes. In fact, the beastmasters had to employ magic just to keep the new creatures under a semblance of control. When the tieflings did control the kruthiks, the creatures served their original purpose well. The sadistic reptiles could just as quickly turn on their erstwhile masters and, given their burrowing capabilities, wander off and kill whatever they found. Because of the dangers they posed, the Turathi emperor had their creators executed and decreed that kruthiks needed to be kept far from population centers.

Kruthiks and Flight

Despite having wings, few kruthiks can fly. For those kruthiks that gain the ability to fly, each flight is actually more of a glorified hop. You can enliven your kruthik encounters by giving a few hatchlings or young kruthiks fly 4 or 6, perhaps with a recharge that requires the kruthik to end a turn on the ground.

Handlers herded the kruthiks into isolated outposts in the Underdark and allowed them out only in times of war. The creatures quickly adapted to their new home, and when the Turathi magic faltered during the empire's fall, the kruthiks slaughtered their handlers and dispersed into the underground realm. Over the millennia, kruthiks flourished throughout the upper reaches of the Underdark, as well as in surface ruins.

Physiology and Life Cycle

Kruthiks are monstrous creatures that become more horrid as they advance through their strange life cycle. Whatever their age, all kruthiks share a few nightmarish characteristics.

A kruthik vaguely resembles a scaly canine covered in plates of thick, silvery chitin. It has six limbs, the front and rear of which end in long, scythelike appendages. Composed of bone, chitin, and steely scales, these fearsome appendages can hew through stone. Even though these limbs end in sharp, tapered points, kruthiks are surprisingly stable. Not only is a kruthik naturally agile, but it can also anchor itself by driving its spiky appendages into whatever surface it is traversing, climbing as quickly as it can run. A kruthik holds its smaller, more dexterous middle limbs closer to its body and uses them to manipulate objects. In addition to serving as a kruthik's primary weapons, manipulators, and means of locomotion, a kruthik's limbs are also its main sensory organs. When in contact with the ground, a kruthik can detect the slightest vibrations, allowing it to pinpoint the location of any creature within a 50-foot radius.

A kruthik's reptilian head is mostly large, serrated mandibles. A frill of armored plates protects the creature's neck and back. As the kruthik ages, these plates become much thicker and less flexible. When a kruthik reaches maturity, ever-thickening chitinous spikes sprout from behind the frill, while similar spikes cover the legs and mandibles. These spikes make even a sedentary kruthik dangerous to approach.

Like other reptiles, kruthiks lay eggs. Once a year, a female lays a clutch of about six slate gray eggs, which hatch a day or two later. Kruthik hatchlings are the size of a small dog and can rend a human in half with their forelimbs. After a week of constant feeding, a hatchling becomes a young kruthik; at this point in their development, these wiry creatures are nearly 3 feet long and weigh 30 pounds. Hatchlings and young kruthiks lack spikes but have veined wings similar to a dragonfly's that grow behind their armored frill. Most can't fly, but their wings give them a speed advantage over their older, heavier brethren.

It takes a young kruthik about a year to mature into an adult that is over 6 feet long and weighs 250 pounds. An adult kruthik raises its armored frill and pumps acerbic venom into its spikes when threatened. By snapping its plates and limbs, an adult kruthik can hurl its spikes short distances with deadly accuracy.

Most kruthiks die before reaching their final life stage. Those that live five or more years, or those that are elder adults when an existing hive lord dies, encase themselves in a dull gray-blue chrysalis and emerge in four weeks as a hive lord. A newly metamorphosed hive lord is nearly 12 feet long and can weigh a ton. Because of its bulkier chitin plates, it can no longer hurl spikes, but its blue saliva, which it can spray in a wide arc, is highly caustic and nauseating.

Social Organization and Behavior

Kruthiks are social creatures that instinctually organize themselves into hierarchal groups called hives, which typically consist of numerous kruthiks led by adults or one or more hive lords. Hives are nomadic. When a hive finds a location to its liking, it excavates a temporary lair and methodically hunts down all available prey, which is any nonkruthik living in the area. The hive then moves on and repeats the process.

Nesting Warrens

The first thing a kruthik hive does when it locates to a new region is build a nest. Kruthiks favor large underground chambers or caverns, especially those suffused with supernatural energies. Anything connected to the Nine Hells draws them like a moth to a flame. This attraction to the supernatural is why they can often be found in ancient ruins. After the hive has located a suitable site, half the hive expands its new home by digging a warren of interconnected chambers and tunnels, while the other half hunts for food. Kruthiks aggressively defend their territory, especially the nest's hatchery and food stores.

Kruthiks don't purposefully hoard treasure, but slain creatures might be dragged back to the warren along with their gear and valuables. Interesting or shiny objects can briefly hold a kruthik's attention. A curious kruthik might bring such objects back to the nest only to discard them later. Enterprising treasure-seekers can find a small fortune among the debris in a warren.

Communication

Kruthiks communicate with each other using a complex series of insectlike chitters and reptilian hisses, and to a limited extent, they also use pheromones. In addition, they are intelligent enough to understand simple phrases in other languages. Many people have noted that speaking even a few phrases of Supernal can give one an edge when dealing with kruthiks, which likely has something to do with their infernal heritage.

Through a combination of auditory signals and pheromones, a hive lord can connect its mind with the minds of the other members of its hive. This rudimentary hive mind is much more intelligent than any individual kruthik and allows a hive to engage in complicated tasks, such as coordinating an attack from multiple directions, focusing attention on a target's weaknesses, making feints, and purposefully collapsing weak structures and caverns on attackers. Multiple hive lords working in concert can make a hive even more tactically effective. Hives that lack a hive lord's direction resort to simple frontal assaults.

A hive lord's authority is absolute. Younger kruthiks carry out a hive lord's instructions without considering alternatives. If a hive is large enough to support multiple hive lords, the eldest and most powerful one rules the rest. The dominant hive lord doesn't have to worry about challengers, since the others willingly accept its position. When the

dominant hive lord dies, the oldest kruthik in the hive immediately assumes leadership. If such a kruthik is not a hive lord, its metamorphosis is likely to occur soon after it takes a leadership role.

When two hives cross paths, the hive lords engage in mortal combat while the other kruthiks watch impassively. The victor devours its rival's corpse and assimilates its hive into its own. (A hive ruled by an adult is assimilated.) A hive welcomes its new members by rhythmically striking their claws against the ground in unison. Given the sounds' dreadful implications, denizens of the Underdark consider such an echoing cacophony to be an ill omen.

Underdark Ecology

Inhabitants of the Underdark wisely fear kruthiks, and even much more powerful creatures regard them as dangerous pests. The kruthik reputation is well deserved. If left unchecked, a ravenous kruthik hive quickly destroys its neighbors, and kruthik burrowing can seriously weaken structures.

Underdark communities that survive a hive's initial onslaught sometimes hire adventurers to exterminate or drive out the creatures. After a certain percentage of a hive is killed, the survivors abandon the nest. These kruthiks leave eggs and cocoons behind, so would-be exterminators must make sure that all such leavings are destroyed, lest a new threat emerge a few days later.

Because kruthiks can't abide the sulfurous smell of their own dead, there's a thriving market for their ichor and body parts. Settlements threatened by a hive often smear the foul-smelling stuff on the walls and floors of their buildings to keep kruthiks at bay. The potency of this ichor is such that a single treatment lasts only a day or two.

The more resourceful inhabitants of the Underdark have found ways of turning kruthiks to their advantage. Armorers covet kruthik chitin. When such plates are properly treated, a skilled craftsperson can use them to create lightweight yet durable armor and shields. After a hive abandons its nesting warrens, surviving neighbors repurpose the abandoned tunnels left behind, which are often large enough for human-sized creatures to comfortably navigate. Explorers long ago noticed the kruthik attraction to supernatural energies, so some adventurers use a migrating hive as a mobile divining rod. Others take advantage of kruthik sensitivities to vibrations to try to predict earthquakes and cave-ins.

Breeding and Controlling Kruthiks

The diabolic secrets of creating kruthiks were lost to the mortal world after the fall of Bael Turath. Alloces has not deigned to share his methods with anyone since. These facts haven't stopped would-be conquerors from trying to breed their own monstrous armies. In particular, duergar and hobgoblins have repeatedly tried and failed to create their own kruthiks.

Today, those interested in commanding kruthiks seek to recover the Turathi artifacts that enabled the tieflings to control the ornery beasts. The Fell Court, a cabal of tieflings based in the Nentir Vale, is dedicated to controlling the legacies of Bael Turath. Their diabolic masters have already granted them dominion over the area's felldrakes, and now they seek the means of controlling kruthiks. The Court's agents, usually dupes, scour the realm for one of the lost *Rods of Kruthik Command*.

These minor artifacts were another gift from Alloces. Using his dark knowledge, Turathi warlocks created the first rods by petrifying kruthik hive lords, binding their still-conscious minds to their obsidian bodies, and then amputating their forelimbs and shaping them into a wieldable form. Besides offering protection against kruthiks, these rods can magically enslave the creatures for short periods. Ideally, the wielder dominates a hive lord and then uses it to control the rest of its hive. The drawback to the rod is that psychic emanations of the device can enrage nearby kruthiks, drawing them to attack with great ferocity and cunning.

Rod of Kruthik Command Heroic Level

This spiky, red-veined obsidian rod resembles the scythelike forelimb of an adult kruthik. When you grasp it, the enraged, alien thoughts of a reptilian mind flood your own.

Artifact: Implement (rod)
Enhancement Bonus: +2 to attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +2d8 damage

Properties

- ✦ Any kruthik within 20 squares of this rod can sense it and its exact location. While you carry or hold the rod, any kruthik that can sense the rod can also sense you and your exact location.
- ✦ While you hold this rod in hand, you are immune to kruthiks' *gnashing horde* aura.
- ✦ While you hold this rod in hand, any kruthik within 10 squares of you considers you to be its ally until you or your allies harm it or another kruthik it can see.
- ✦ While you carry or hold the rod, you grant combat advantage to kruthiks.

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Minor Action)

Effect: You activate an aura 2 that lasts until the end of the encounter. Any kruthik ally in the aura deals double damage with its basic attacks.

Attack Power (Acid) **✦ Encounter** (Standard Action)

Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); your level + 2 (up to +12) vs. Fortitude
Hit: One-half your level + 5 acid damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 acid damage and is weakened (save ends both).
Miss: Half damage.

Attack Power (Charm) **✦ Daily** (Standard Action)

Attack: Ranged 10 (one kruthik you can see); level + 3 (up to +13) vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated for 24 hours.
Miss: This power is not expended.

Statistics

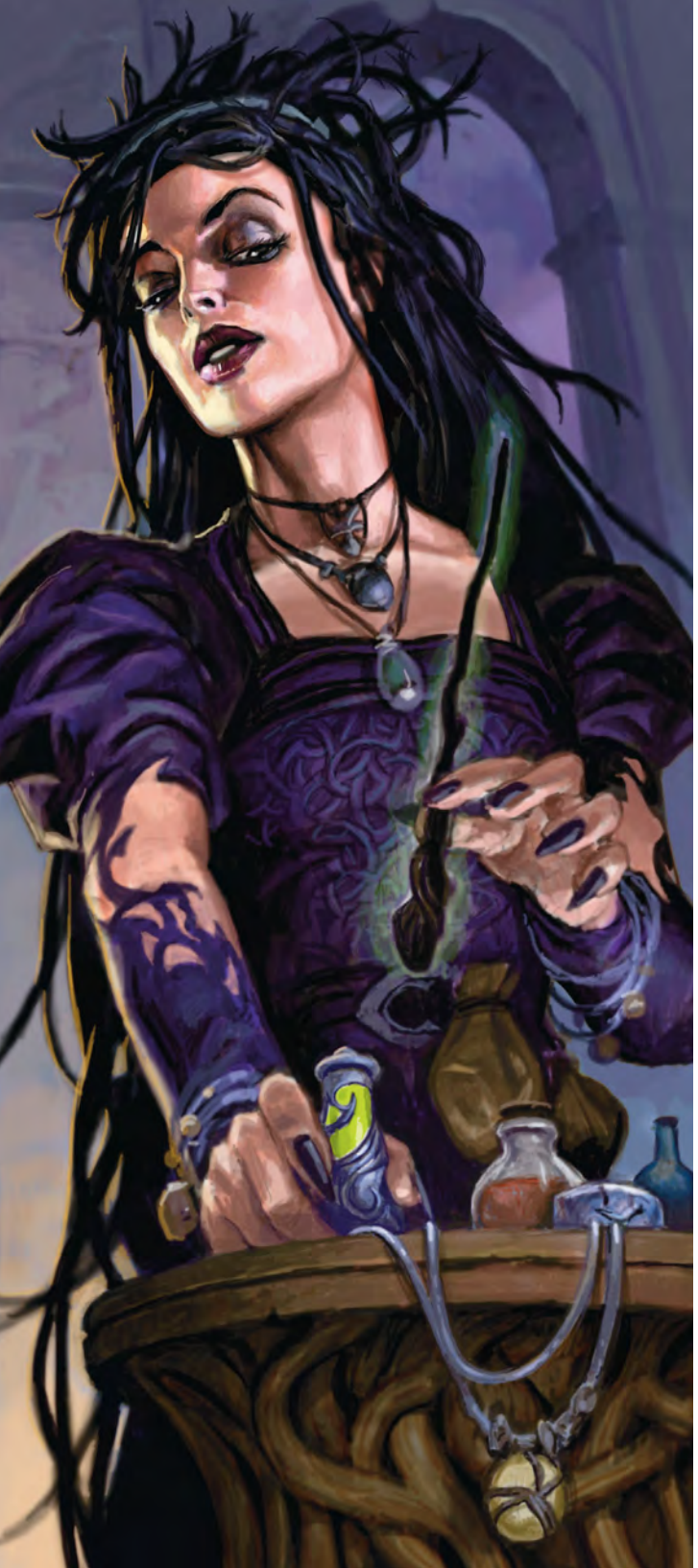
The following statistics are updates of two previously published kruthiks.

Kruthik Hive Lord	**Level 6 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Large natural beast (reptile)	XP 500
HP 148; **Bloodied** 74	**Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 17	**Perception** +4
Speed 6, burrow 3 (tunneling), climb 6	Low-light vision, tremorsense 10
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1	
Traits	
☼ **Hive Frenzy ✦ Aura** 2	
Any kruthik ally in the aura deals double damage with its basic attacks.	
Standard Actions	
⨤ **Claw ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d12 + 8 damage.	
⨤ **Double Attack ✦ At-Will**	
Effect: The hive lord uses *claw* twice.	
⌖ **Acid Blast** (acid) **✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +9 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d8 + 7 acid damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 acid damage and is weakened (save ends both).	
Str 20 (+8) **Dex** 18 (+7) **Wis** 12 (+4)	
Con 18 (+7) **Int** 4 (+0) **Cha** 10 (+3)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Fresh-Hatched Kruthik Swarm	**Level 3 Brute**
Medium natural beast (reptile, swarm)	XP 150
HP 55; **Bloodied** 27	**Initiative** +4
AC 15, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 12	**Perception** +1
Speed 8, climb 8	Low-light vision
Traits	
☼ **Gnashing Horde ✦ Aura** 1	
Any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.	
Swarm	
The swarm can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space, which is difficult terrain. The swarm cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for a Tiny creature.	
Standard Actions	
⨤ **Claw ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage.	
Str 15 (+3) **Dex** 16 (+4) **Wis** 10 (+1)	
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 4 (-2) **Cha** 6 (-1)	
Alignment unaligned Languages –	

About the Author

Tim Eagon is a freelance writer living in Madison, Wisconsin, who has written many articles for *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. He would like to thank all of the 4th Edition fans who have read and enjoyed his works.



FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

The Three-Headed Helm

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Zoltan Boros

Whispered words are racing across Faerûn of something called the Three-Headed Helm. A cult, some say; a secret society, according to others; or some fell ruler's attempt to unite adventurers, brigands, and outlaws alike into an army to be flung against the gods alone can guess which realm.

Certainty is nowhere to be found, and muttered rumors run rampant. Those who claim to be of the Threefold Helm or speaking for it consistently use the phrase "New Aid for Adventurers."

But what does that mean? What is the Three-Headed Helm, really?

Some kings are sending forth veteran agents to find out—capable men, women, and monsters who've killed in royal service before and are swiftly ready to do so again.

Wild Rumors

In Thesk, Impiltur, and the vicinity, persistent rumors promote two warring beliefs about the Three-Headed Helm.

One holds that it is a cult, a new religion that exalts warriors who serve its mysterious leaders (whose faces are always hidden behind closed-visored helms), and that those leaders venerate "Risen Helm" who will—if his loyal and true worshipers do the right things—usher in a new prosperity and lasting peace to a restored Realms in which justice and vigilant guardianship against marauding monsters and lawless ones will keep most folk safe and secure, so they can devote their efforts to making daily life better for all. Those right things include, in the days and months just ahead, some covert actions against corrupt authority and those who exploit and overtax.[1]

The rival opinion is that the Three-Headed Helm is a secret society, led by monsters who conceal their inhumanity behind closed-visored helms and full suits of plate armor,[2] that seeks to weaken human realms everywhere so their rulers can be overthrown, their lawkeepers decimated, and monsters can hunt and despoil at will.[3]

Although these two beliefs are heard elsewhere in the Realms, they have competition in those other regions—particularly along the Sword Coast, where other rumors insist that guildmasters everywhere (or just certain specific ones) have secretly entered into league with dissatisfied nobility (or exiled former nobles, or both) to bring down current rulers everywhere (or just in this or that specific land), to supplant them in a "New Rule" with common trade-laws, a "Code of the Road" that will increase trade and lead to greater prosperity for all.[4]

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A new, rival set of rumors centers on the belief that the Helms are cruel tyrants from Abeir or some other, rival world beyond our knowing, who have taken advantage of the chaos across Toril to flee their own place, where they are hated and hunted, and find new slaves to oppress here. Some rumors insist they are cannibals, who want to roast and eat the most succulent humans or halflings, or just young females, or only males.[5]

What Elminster Knows

The Sage of Shadowdale finds all of these rumors "inevitable, and even entertaining in a fearmongering, nasty way," but says the truth about the Three-Headed Helm is far more mundane, yet potentially just as perilous for law and order across the Realms.

The Threefold Helm, Elminster insists, is no more nor less than a newly founded secret society that heals and rescues and provides shelter, banking [6], and hidden refuge services for adventurers (of every stripe, race, and scruple)—in return for the adventurers providing temporary fighting services on the society's behalf.

The society is run by a small, motley group of embittered bastard royal offspring and dispossessed former ruling houses from all over the Realms.[7] They want all governments weakened, and they want adventurers to serve as a counter to lawkeepers and governors everywhere to discourage arrogance, corruption, and highhandedness.

In the short term, this means they want adventurers to aid outlaws, raid government coffers, and strike at government agents. Which will, of course, earn all adventurers a certain less than savory reputation.

The Three Helms

The three founders and leaders of the society are an embittered daughter of the long-outcast (from Waterdeep) noble House of Zoar; the grandson of a bastard son of Azoun IV; and a fugitive from justice in Amn, a doppelganger now posing as a human hermaphrodite, "Ember Hawklaeros." These three are now a firm family unit, a quasi-married trio who stick together and ruthlessly eliminate all threats to them and their plans.

Andrethra Zoar is a short, slender, dark-eyed woman with ankle-length black hair and a quiet, serene manner. She is a sorceress of accomplishment and an ever-increasing collection of seized magic items—and is also a calculating schemer who's always prepared for trouble, from the lockpicks hidden in her hair and the belt-pouches of pepper ready to throw into the eyes of foes to elaborate escape plans and prepared sequences of spells.[8] Elminster described her as "ruthless and paranoid." To lesser members of the society, she's known as Unicorn.

Malatchan Stornar is a terse, stoic fighter and weaponsmaster who's also made a living as a scrivener and bookkeeper. He faces whatever comes his way in life, ready to fight and defeat it; he owns a vast collection of weapons, and has trained with all of them. His father was Lorantar Stornar and his grandfather was Orlongmaen "Longmane" Stornar, one of the eldest illegitimate sons of Azoun IV (fathered before Azoun was out of his twenties).[9] Lesser society members know him as Tallknight.

"Ember Hawklaeros" was formerly Istlavan Chethmerender, a priest of Cyric in Athkatla whom the doppelganger had secretly murdered and replaced. Arrested for certain thefts done by the real Chethmerender, the doppelganger escaped by shifting shape to escape manacles and slip through the bars of a dungeon cell—but was seen doing so, and had to flee a band of on-retainer adventurers who were ordered to hunt down and slay it.[10] The doppelganger Ayertros is a cunning, patient skulker who is truly devoted to Cyric (it's why the creature took the place of Chethmerender) and the spreading of strife. To the society, this third founder is Blackcowl—and various society members have heard that Blackcowl is either a man or a woman.[11]

All of the Helms see wizards and those who wield magic items as personal threats. So they agree that wizards must be slain or discredited whenever prudently possible, and magic items end up in the hands of the Three Helms or—on an as-needed, mission-by-mission basis—a handful of their most trusted Gauntlets.

The Helms want no large armies to exist in the Realms, but rather many small mercenary bands, so no king can become emperor and no huge invasions can occur. Wars should be a series of small skirmishes. Guilds, nobility, and caravan costers co-opted to hammer out agreements for the common use of roads, ports, bridges, and fords, out of self-interest. All of these elements will make rulers (above the level of mayors) largely unnecessary—so they can be made and kept largely powerless. An ideal king is a sort of "high judge" to decide disputes between powerful persons, and nothing more.

The Gauntlets

Beneath the three Helms are their "Gauntlets," just under a score of strong-willed former nobles who are the active backbone of the society. Of these, some serve more as spies, sponsors, and provisioners, and a few aren't overly trusted by the Helms—but seven of them seem staunchly loyal and are treated as such by the three founders.

These most trusted Gauntlets, in ascending order of seniority (or proven trust) are "Nightcloak," the gleeful killer Claedrem Bleth (of the exiled Bleths of Cormyr); "Red Glove," his older cousin Malaskarados Bleth (a consummate actor who can easily feign a royal heritage); "Silverpike," a bitter but elegant half-elf, Halaunce Starym (scorned by most for being a Starym, and scorned by the Starym for his halfblood heritage); "Scornstag" or more properly Skarandros

Pelmarr, a former self-made king of Emdlringh, a now-vanished eastern Border Kingdom; "Onestar," who is really Ruthtryn Gildeggh, of the exiled Waterdhavian noble House of Gildeggh; "Horntal," who is Dannathaera Goldsword, of the exiled Cormyrean noble House of Goldsword; and "Boldstone," who is Shevrathla Orgaunt, of the exiled-in-absentia rebel noble House of Orgaunt (of Arabel, in Cormyr).

The Gauntlets operate separately, and they take care to learn and use only assumed nicknames of their fellow members of the society, so if any are ever captured and tortured, the roster of the Three-Headed Helm can't be yielded up. To reinforce this recalcitrance, Andrethra Zoar casts spells (of her own devising) on their minds, that twist and inhibit their memories of some faces and names.[12]

Notes

1. All of these quoted phrases come from the speeches of a hitherto-unknown human woman (tall, fair-haired, and emerald-eyed), who calls herself "the Herald of Risen Helm" and wanders the region preaching in full plate armor. If anyone tries to attack or detain her, plate-armored guardians rush out of hiding, their features hidden behind closed visors, to defend her and bear her away. On at least one occasion, she and her guardians vanished in seemingly impossible circumstances, apparently using magic to disappear from a blind-end alley they were pursued into.

2. Some gossips believe the Helms are really clever orc lords, who have decided to pave the way for their Horde soon to sweep down from the North by sowing disarray and discord in the lands they intend to invade. As one rumor put it, "We knew the orcs would someday become as clever as men. Now they have, and their hordes will become *truly* dangerous, rather than mere massed brutish onslaughts."

3. The farther one travels from Thay, in this region, the more one also hears that Thay is behind this, seeking to weaken surrounding lands so they can more easily be conquered, and their citizens enslaved.

4. Moreover, runs this rumor, such a Code will make travelers everywhere safer, because they can trust in local laws and treatment more than they can right now, where outlanders usually fall under immediate suspicion when local crimes occur. So if you've ever wanted to see the splendors of this or that distant place, but not dared even set foot outside your own town . . .

5. One belief heard in the vicinity of Scornubel and Iriaebor is that the Helms are "Elder Illithids" from "the place illithids originally came from," who want to devour not just human brains—but entire human bodies, "from topknots to toenails." These elder illithids intend to conquer kingdoms and turn them into breeding farms of humans destined for illithid dining tables. Inevitably, an embroidering rumor whispers that these illithids have recruited the drow to be their conquering armies, and the day will soon come when the Dark Ones will boil up out of the Realms Below to butcher and enslave.

6. Not just safe storage of treasure, but loans (at reasonable rates) to pay off debts and fines. Yet as Alaphondar the sage of Cormyr was fond of saying, "Beware easy credit. It paves a downward road."

7. As Elminster put it, "far more rulers than the Obarskyrs of Cormyr and the Lords of Waterdeep have exiled nobles or stripped them of titles, lands, and all. So the list of those who hate occupants of various thrones and palaces, and want to get even, is long indeed. From Amn and Baldur's Gate to Tethyr and Ulgarth, the expelled and dispossessed are legion."

8. Andrethra is a keen student of Waterdhavian history, and she, her father, and her now-dead older brother all covertly entered the City of Splendors many times, under a variety of assumed names, to taste the life of the city (up to and including noble revels), and in Andrethra's case, to identify minor sorcerers she could murder and rob.

9. The mother was the beautiful Alyendra Morlindar, who passed Azoun's child off as the offspring of her union (made in haste, after her dalliance with Azoun) with Orlund Stornar, of the self-styled noble House of Stornar of High Sembia (the countryside immediately south of Yhaunn).

10. Slaughtering this persistent band of adventurers, Haldivar's Bold Shields, was one of the first things the Three Helms did together, after befriending each other.

11. Most have no inkling that Blackcowl is a shapeshifter or hermaphrodite, and think "Blackcowl" is two people, one male and one female, sharing the office or role. The other two founders of the society believe that their beloved Ayertros is a hermaphrodite, not a doppelganger.

12. Lesser members of the society, below the Gauntlets, are styled "Eyes," and they learn the faces and names of fellow members only when they need to so that they can work with them on specific tasks. If called upon to do anything murderous, they are soon relocated to elsewhere in the Realms.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which space remains to pile up more papers.